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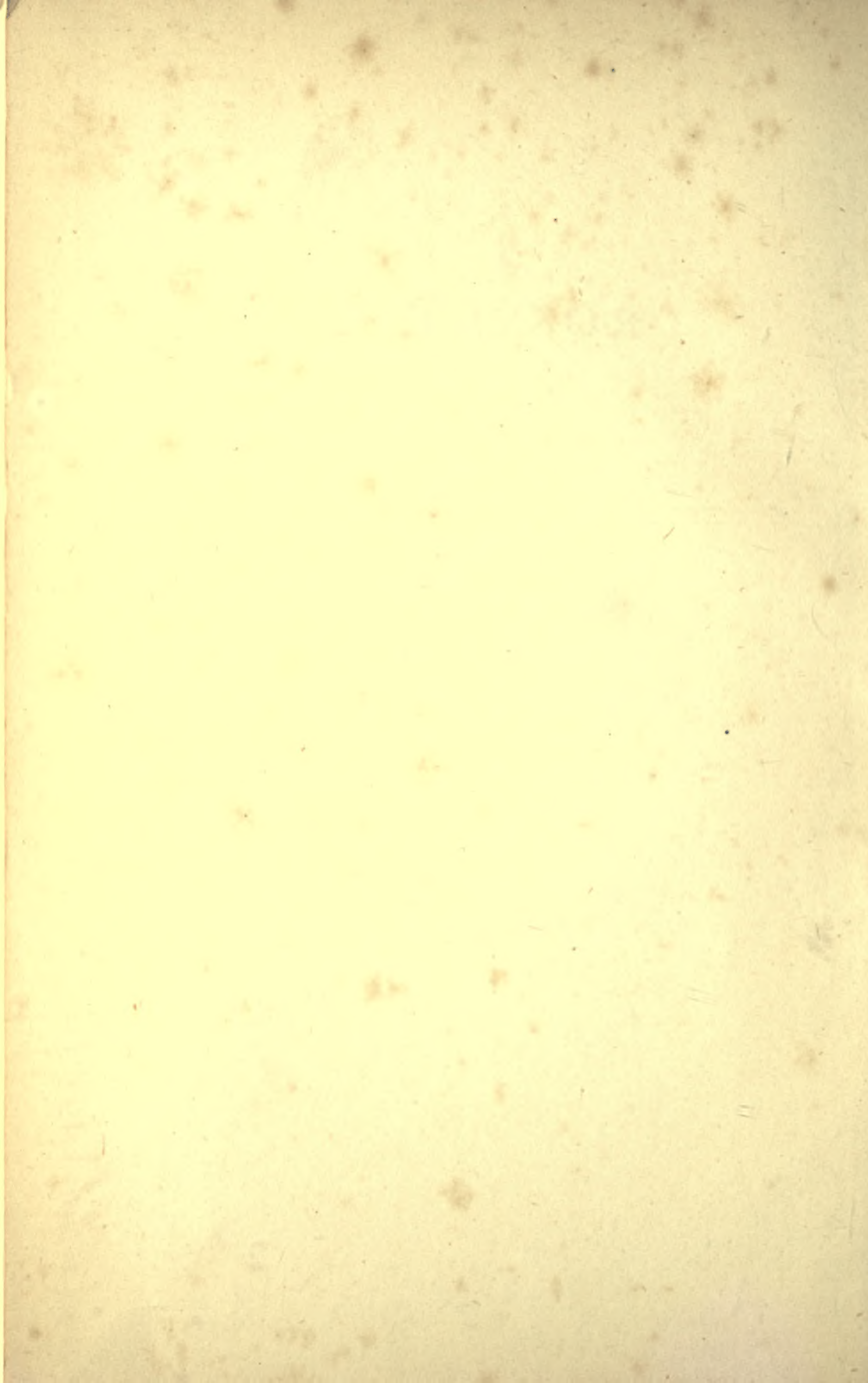
I

ROSSETTI



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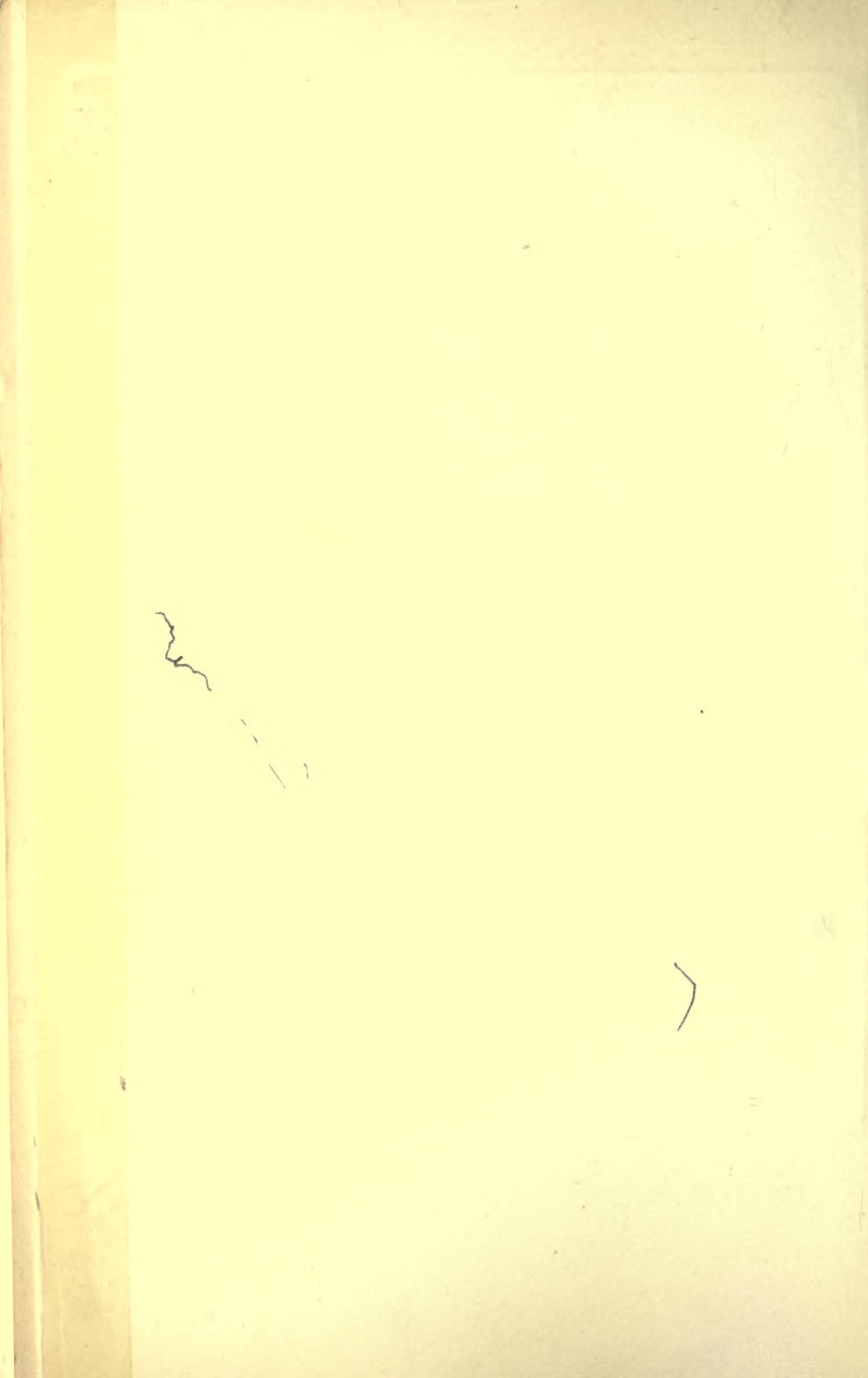
THE GIRLHOOD OF MARY VIRGIN.



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THE BELOVED.

Ford, Ford Madox

ROSSETTI

A CRITICAL ESSAY ON HIS ART BY

FORD MADOX HUEFFER

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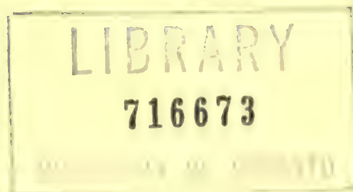

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CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I—INTRODUCTORY 9

CHAPTER II

Parentage : Father's career and influence : Mother's parentage : Childhood and education of the young Rossettis 12

CHAPTER III (1842–1848)

Art Education : " Sass's " : Translations from German and Italian : Attitude towards teachers : Personal appearance : The Pre-Raphaelites : Rossetti's share in the " Brotherhood " : His friendships : Madox Brown : Mr. Holman Hunt : Rossetti's artistic development towards 1848 16

CHAPTER IV (1848–1852)

The Girlhood of Mary Virgin : The " Germ " : *The Annunciation* : Sketches for " historic " pictures : *The Laboratory* : Miss Siddal : *Beatrice at the Wedding Feast* : *Borgia* : General characteristics of Rossetti's work towards 1852 22

CHAPTER V (1853–1856)

Professional prospects in 1853 : Leigh Hunt on Rossetti's verse : Rossetti abandons verse-writing : His mediævalism : John Ruskin : His friendship with Rossetti : Other friendships : *Dante drawing an Angel in memory of Beatrice* : *Hesterna Rosa* : *Found* : *Arthur's Tomb* : *Paolo and Francesco* : *Dante's Dream* : Illustrations : Rossetti as " literary " painter 30

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER VI (1857–1862)

New friendships : Malory : Sir Edward Burne-Jones : William Morris : Oxford : The Æsthetic Movement : Mr. Swinburne : The Oxford Museum paintings : Rossetti's Decorative-Mediæval works : *The Blue Closet* : *The Wedding of St. George* : *The Christmas Carol* : *The Tune of Seven Towers* : Rossetti *not* an essentially "Decorative" painter : The *Ophelia* designs : *Mary Magdalen at the door of Simon the Pharisee* : *Cassandra* : *Bocca Baciata* : *Lucrezia Borgia* : *Dr. Johnson at the Mitre* : *How they met Themselves* 40

CHAPTER VII (1862–1871)

Death of Mrs. Rossetti : Morris and Co. : Cheyne Walk, Chelsea : Rossetti's purchases and tastes in furniture : *Fair Rosamund* : *Joan of Arc* : "Goblin Market" : *Beata Beatrix* : *The Seed of David* : General characteristics of his work at this period : *The Beloved* : *Lilith* : *Venus Verticordia* : *The Loving Cup* : *Joli Cœur* : *Aurea Catena* : Sketches and Studies 56

CHAPTER VIII (1872–1882)

Ill-health, insomnia, chloral, etc. : Publication of the Poems : Mr. Buchanan's attack on Rossetti : Rossetti's personal character : His Romanticism : His friends : His poems : His pictures : *Veronica Veronese* : *La Ghirlandata* : *The Roman Widow* : *Proserpine* : Other works : His death 71

CHAPTER IX

General consideration of Rossetti's work 82

LIST OF PHOTOGRAVURES

Note.—The illustrations that appear by permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti are reproduced from photographs by Messrs. Mansell.

Facing p.

"THE BELOVED"
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti *Frontispiece*

D. G. ROSSETTI. PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF (1855) 10
By permission of Mr. Fairfax Murray and the Autotype Co.

CHALK DRAWING OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI 12
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"THE GIRLHOOD OF MARY VIRGIN" 22
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"THE LABORATORY" 24
By permission of Mr. Fairfax Murray and the Autotype Co.

MISS SIDDALL 26
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"FOUND." THE ORIGINAL DESIGN 32
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

STUDY FOR "FOUND" 34
By permission of the Autotype Co.

"PAOLO AND FRANCESCA" 36
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

"DESIGN FOR A BALLAD" 38
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"SIR TRISTRAM AND LA BELLE YSEULT" 42
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

"DANTIS AMOR" 46
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"THE SALUTATION OF BEATRICE" 48
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

"A CHRISTMAS CAROL" 50
By permission of Mr. Fairfax Murray and the Autotype Co.

LIST OF PHOTOGRAVURES

Facing p.

"OPHELIA RETURNING THE GIFTS TO HAMLET" 52
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"HOW THEY MET THEMSELVES" 52
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"DR. JOHNSON AT THE MITRE" 54
By permission of Mr. Fairfax Murray and the Autotype Co.

"JOAN OF ARC KISSING THE SWORD OF DELIVERANCE" 58
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

"BEATA BEATRIX." From the Picture in the National Gallery 60

"DAVID, PASTOR." From the Llandaff Triptych 62
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

FIGURE OF KNEELING ANGEL. From Centre of Llandaff Triptych 64
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

"WASHING HANDS" 66
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"LILITH" 68
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"THE LOVING CUP." From the Drawing 68
By permission of the Autotype Co.

"JOLI CŒUR" 70
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

"AUREA CATENA." 70
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

"THE LADY WITH THE FAN" 72
By permission of Mr. Fairfax Murray and the Autotype Co.

STUDY OF A HEAD 74
By permission of Mr. W. M. Rossetti

"LA GHIRLANDATA" 78
By permission of the Autotype Co.

"PROSERPINE" 80
By permission of Mr. C. Butler and the Autotype Co.

"ROSA TRIPLEX" 82
By permission of the Autotype Co.

HEAD OF "THE BLESSED DAMOZEL" 84
By permission of Mr. F. Hollyer

I

WE may call Rossetti a genius; we cannot call him a master. A great master's art is the art of a man who knows, who has found out for himself—after pains more or less acute, after many wasted essays more or less definite in aim, after many failures felt and learned from—how to produce consummately the impression that he aims at. Rossetti never mastered his instrument. He had a great gift of sympathy, and great talents of expression; but for mastery he substituted an erratic handling of his material. His one settled habit as a painter was to attempt impulsively, ardently, or pertinaciously, to render whatever pleased him, without the supreme instinct for what his technique could accomplish. The master pays beforehand the price of hard study, of disillusionment, of "training," of long barren hours. He receives the power to render things dispassionately, unswervingly and authentically. The genius enjoys his work; proceeds along the lines of least resistance, and pays the price afterwards. The price is the failure to be universally convincing—the being, in fact, convincing only to those that are of goodwill, and the being never technically consummate.

What, however, is essential in all works of art is the one thing—"charm"; the one quality that will atone for all technical failures; the one thing lacking which no picture, technically perfect, can for a moment hold, seize upon and overwhelm. And charm

is the one quality that Rossetti's work, considered as a body, can definitely and unflinchingly have claimed for it.

It is along the lines here indicated rather than definitely laid down that the present writer intends to proceed. It is of course impossible to get at the nature of this thing, charm. In the case of Rossetti, however, one can trace what it was that charmed him in the world.

Again, the most profitable method of criticism is that of paying attention to a man's work. For the intrusion of a certain amount of biographical matter and of personal facts (which in ordinary cases can only lead to that most bastard of all forms of criticism—that based on *a priori* knowledge) the present writer must apologize. The artist should be allowed to live out his life in peace. If he is not, if the censor of manners must for the public good be called in to say: "This man was a good citizen and saved money; this a Bohemian who worked after supper," our view of his art becomes generally less clear.

But, precisely, because Rossetti's work is almost always a matter of re-reflected personal influences; because, that is, the people with whom Rossetti had to do very much influenced Rossetti's work; because Rossetti painted what he liked rather than what he knew to be, it becomes necessary to indicate what Rossetti the man liked. Bearing this well in mind the present writer will attempt to state as clearly as is practicable what he thinks are the true bearings on Rossetti of the various movements that Rossetti came in contact with; of the men by whom he was influenced; of the things, in short, that created his various states of mind. The task is not the easiest of the easy. One is acquainted with so much of gossip; of unmeasured eulogy, and of sober chronicling of

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D. G. ROSSETTI—PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF, 1855.

Rossetti's deeds that it becomes almost daily more difficult not to be led into thinking that on the one hand his work is a sort of stew of the drugs of gossip, bric-à-brac and improvidences; and on the other that Rossetti was a megalomaniac figure of the boards with a growing and interested *claque* all round him. Neither is the case. Rossetti, personally, was a great, magnetic and prodigal figure; he attracted many men of all kinds. But the facts of that kind are the province of the psychologist. The present writer will attempt to neglect as far as is possible all those not bearing directly upon Rossetti's work.

II

GABRIEL CHARLES DANTE ROSSETTI was born on 12th May 1828.

The story of his ancestry, by its nature singularly suggestive, makes at the same time suggestions so obvious as to call for but the barest statement. Three quarters of his blood was pure Italian—one half Neapolitan, one quarter Central Italian. His father was, and still is, esteemed in Italy as the revolutionary poet of early Italian nationalism, and is somewhat, but in a kindly way, laughed at as a mystical, but very profound, very laborious and very "obstinate" student of the *Divina Commedia* and of the earlier Italian poets. He elucidated their works by the light of a Freemasonic, Anti-Papal system. He had besides considerable skill as a minute sepia-vignette draughtsman. His father was a blacksmith of Vasto in the Kingdom of Naples; a man of some eminence in his village; a good talker and a man of strong character. Gabriele Rossetti's circumstances made him tolerate the Napoleonic régime in Naples. Under Joseph Buonaparte and Murat he was conservator of a museum of art. When, after the fall of Napoleon, Ferdinand was restored, Gabriele Rossetti was one of the Liberals who were literally proscribed. He was a strong supporter of the Carbonari, whose aim was the forcing a constitution on the Bourbon kings. To escape from the king's gallows—in which he was aided and abetted by the officers of a British man-of-war—

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CHALK DRAWING OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

he went to Malta in 1821. Later, the intrigues of the agents of Ferdinand of Naples made his position in Malta so unpleasant that in 1824 he came to England, where he became Professor of Italian at King's College. There, in 1826, he married Maria Francesca Polidori, a lady whose mother's maiden name was Pearce. The Polidori and Pearce families were both pedagogic by profession.

Gabriele Rossetti had four children: Maria Francesca, Dante Gabriel, William Michael and Christina Georgina.

Polidori, the maternal grandfather, was by descent on his father's side a Central Italian. He was a man of some wealth, of respectable position, and very rigid propriety; he had acquired a competency by teaching, and during the childhood of the young Rossettis he was the owner of a private printing press.

The books that he produced were as a rule semi-educational collections of Moral Tales intended to be used in the upbringing of middle-class English pupils, who in that day nearly all learnt Italian. Polidori's daughters, the mother and aunt of Rossetti, were trusted governesses and companions in great families. The Polidori influence—the mother's—on the Rossetti children was to a great extent English, with a more or less strong tendency towards the Anglicanism that afterwards led to the Tractarian movement.

Rossetti, the father, was a practically sceptic—and strongly Anti-Papal—Catholic. His face strikingly resembled that of the late Mr. Gladstone: very vigorous, very determined, and as if dominated by an *idée fixe*, which, in the days of the young Rossettis, had caused him to become a very old, rather awfully reverend scholar. He was indeed much reverenced by his compatriots in England—old exiles and young conspirators. To his children his abstruse studies

made him, his system, and Dante Alighieri along with them, take a somewhat remote position in the household. Early letters show that he received perhaps more reverence than affection from his children. Their affection and reverence for their mother exhibit, on the other hand, a touching and typical instance of the kind.

The necessity for living within convenient distance of King's College settled the family within the bounds of that part of London that we now call the West Central district—(Rossetti was born and lived during his childhood in Charlotte Street, Portland Place). Mediævalism, however, had already overwhelmed the world with the work of Scott, and the household of the Rossettis was definitely Italian. They had practically no English friends.

The boys for a time went to King's College School; they may be said to have brought little back. It was the home-life that really mattered. During their later childhood they became enthusiasts for the purchase of Knight's publications—a number of works for the popularizing of all the sciences; works which preceded and went side by side with the founding of Mechanics' Institutes.

Another work that greatly "influenced" the young Rossetti was "Retsch's Outlines"—various series of designs illustrating Shakespeare's plays. These appeared at intervals during twenty years or so, a *Hamlet* in 1828; a *Macbeth* in 1833; a *Lear* in 1838; a *Merry Wives* in 1844.

One should also not forget *Melmoth the Wanderer*—Mathurin's version of the *Juif Errant* legend—and, for the girls, at least, devotional verse like that of Lord Herbert. One of Christina's earliest poems takes its subject, and its last line entire, from the former vigorous and supernaturally blood-curdling

romance; another is directly modelled upon a poem of Herbert's.

One gets a sufficient idea of the essential facts of Rossetti's childhood from these details. They undoubtedly suggest the main ideas of his later intellectual story. One must consider all these things, Italian, romantic, literary and ethical, as operating on the inflammable minds of a family of young people, a family intensely united; intensely emulous; the members spurring one another on; competing in several of the arts of expression.

III

ROSSETTI'S Art Instruction began in an Academy of the Fine Arts, kept by a Mr. Cary, and generally known as Sass's. Rossetti went there in 1842 and remained until 1846. How much he actually learnt is scarcely ascertainable. One may call it a vanishing quantity. One may call what he learnt at the Academy Schools the same.

After he had left Cary's he did not know that the human leg contains more than one bone, although he had there, according to Mr. Stephens, an actual opportunity of drawing from skeletons ; he never had a scientific knowledge of perspective. At this stage he commenced a large oil-painting of an old monk, a young girl, and the devil as tempter. He had no knowledge of oil-painting, and Sir Charles Eastlake discouraged the idea of the picture's completion. It was to have been called : *Retro me Satanas.*

During 1844–6 Rossetti was much impressed by the powers of Gavarni, a French draughtsman, whose work approaches caricature of much vigour and coarseness of penwork. Some of Rossetti's drawings in the style of that master—Gavarni really was a master—are still extant, and may be called his earliest appreciable work. They are interesting as showing that Rossetti became a comparatively skilled draughtsman quite early. He also came across Madox Brown's *Parisina* and his cartoons exhibited in Westminster Hall. During the same years he began translating—firstly

Burger's "Lenore"; then the "Nibelungenlied," of which he made versions of a considerable quantity; and then of Dante. It was in 1845 that he commenced his translations from the Early Italian Poets. He fell under the influence of Shelley, of Keats, and of Browning. In May of 1847 he wrote the first draft of the *Blessed Damozel*, and a little later that of *Jenny*.

Fortunately or unfortunately he had in his blood a constitutional contempt for maxims of authority; and he probably had an intense intellectual contempt for his teachers and even for his fellow-students. He is said to have behaved with some rudeness to Mr. Cary, and (in words quoted by Mr. Stephens from a fellow student at the Academy School) "came forward rather brusquely there and, having both hands in his pockets, faced the student-world with an insouciant air which savoured of defiance, mental pride, and thorough self-reliance."

A forward, perhaps rather spoilt, young man, coming out of a foreign family into English school-life, has either to go to the wall very pronouncedly, or very pronouncedly to take the lead. Rossetti took the lead. He had what we must call personal magnetism; a fine voice; great gifts of sarcasm and of that mimicry which is called "taking people off"; the power of inspiring enthusiasm for forlorn hopes; untiring vivacity; the Latin, or Romance, grand manner. He had no snobbishness. In that way he became the inspiriting force of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the two other chief members of which were Millais and Mr. Holman Hunt.

These three men came in contact one with another; they were seeking a "principle," in which they were like half the rest of the world of that day; they found one which was "take your inspiration from Nature"; they, dragging in their connexions and friends, formed

a sort of *côterie*—Mr. Stephens calls it a "League of Sincerity"—composed of young men inclined to adopt that principle. And they received a nick-name which was floating in the air at that time. This name they adopted half out of bravado.

It is impracticable to undertake to estimate how much influence Rossetti's Italian blood had upon the work that the other two artists did during the few years that the Brotherhood subsisted.

Mr. Holman Hunt states that he first saw Rossetti—towards 1847—when they were both engaged in "drawing Ghiberti," by which the present writer supposes him to indicate that they were both, in early days, attracted by Italian fifteenth century work. That the P.R.B. was founded over a portfolio of Lasinio's rather indifferent engravings of the frescoes in the Campo Santo of Pisa; that the "Lasinio incident" may be "proper to the months of August or September 1848"; that it occurred at Millais' house "No. 83 (now No. 7) Gower Street, having a long rather shed-like studio, built out on the ground-floor along the line of a narrow turning"—all these things ought to be familiar to the public.

These engravings undoubtedly gave the Italian impulse. It was certainly not in the first place Rossetti, for Madox Brown has recorded that, before that date, he had remonstrated with Rossetti for light-heartedly deriding the painters who painted before Raphael.

But it should be here pointed out, and the fact should be emphasized as much as is practicable, that the essential point of the Pre-Raphaelite movement was the study not of the Early Italian painters, but of Nature. The delusive habit of accounting for all things by race-mysticism and the fact that Rossetti was an Italian have much obscured the point of view.

Rossetti certainly never got what technique he had from the study of Orcagna's frescoes or, later, from the works of Botticelli. And, in essence at least, the Pre-Raphaelites proclaimed the early Italian frescoists great painters because they observed natural objects directly. They tried themselves to do the same in contrast to the then British School which had no other aim than the producing of Old Masters by recipe.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the real Rossetti was nothing less than he was either early Italian or Victorian Pre-Raphaelite, and it is nearly safe to regard him as having been drawn into the movement by his sympathy with whatever was young, buoyant and "agin the Government." He was in sympathy with the practical ends Mr. Hunt had in view, and had no logical or reasoned idea of to what, æsthetically, he was committing himself. But his Italian dramatic faculties were so great that he could act; speak brilliantly; and even to some extent paint, like a Pre-Raphaelite.

The whole movement was one of several wrong turnings up which Rossetti was beguiled by his friendships and enthusiasms—the first of many. He so often, as it were, went out of his way to see friends on the road home that it seems likely that he never knew where he himself was going or what was his real great gift and talent. He might have climbed much higher than he ever did had he been more unselfish, less ready to identify himself with the ideals, the interests, or the enthusiasms of the many friends that his own fine nature drew into contact with himself.

Some six months before the "Lasinio incident" Rossetti had been impressed by several of Madox Brown's pictures. In March 1848, whilst still a student in the Antique School of the Royal Academy,

he wrote a fervent letter to Madox Brown, asking to be admitted one of his pupils : . . . "I have always listened with avidity if your name happened to be mentioned, and rushed first of all to your number in the Catalogue. *The Parisina*, the *Study in the Manner of the Early Masters*, *Our Lady of Saturday Night* and the other glorious works you have exhibited, have successively raised my admiration and kept me standing in the same spot for fabulous lengths of time. The outline from your *Abstract Representation of Justice*, which appeared in one of the Illustrated Papers, constitutes, together with an engraving after that great painter, Von Holst, the sole pictorial adornments of my room." This extract indicates well enough the enthusiasm of Rossetti's nature. Von Holst, who was not a particularly notable person, he admired for his handling of supernatural subjects—for his telling a ghost-story in fact. Madox Brown's *Parisina* is a really fine work in the older manner ; the *Study*, etc., and the *Our Lady of Saturday Night* are definite and necessarily timid attempts towards light.

Rossetti accordingly became Madox Brown's pupil, and Madox Brown tried to teach him to paint. Rossetti found the process too troublesome. At the Royal Academy of the same year he saw Mr. Holman Hunt's *Eve of St. Agnes*, and the merits of this work caused him to transfer his allegiance from Madox Brown to Holman Hunt. (Mr. Hunt has recorded that Rossetti declared "in loud tongue" to Mr. Hunt at the opening day that "mine was the best picture of the year.") Mr. Hunt, who was then a painter of attainments quite beyond those of his admirer, took the only line that was possible with a person of Rossetti's temperament seeking instruction. He suggested that Rossetti should commence a definite design which should have a literary interest to amuse and

sustain him ; that he should commence it by putting in the still-life accessories and afterwards add the figures of the dramatic motive. This Rossetti did. In August of 1848 he moved into and began to share Mr. Hunt's studio.

Rossetti, however, undoubtedly could draw before that date. His pencil portrait of his grandfather Polidori is a really distinguished piece of work. As far as the head goes it is undoubtedly a technical inspiration of Holbein's. In this we must trace Madox Brown's influence (it should be stated that Madox Brown's first attempt at " finding the new road " was a portrait that he called *A Modern Holbein*), but the precision of line and strength of characterization must of course have been already " in " Rossetti. At about the same time Millais—who even at that date knew something about these matters—wrote of a design by Rossetti : " A very clever and original design, beautifully executed." After falling foul of the composition without any mercy, he adds : " Chairs out of perspective." It was this design (a " Gretchen " composition) that Rossetti set to work upon in Mr. Hunt's studio.

Rossetti then, towards the close of 1848 and in his twenty-first year, was approaching his first picture. He may be said to have been able to draw extremely well ; to have no personal knowledge of painting, of composition, of *chiaroscuro* or of perspective and anatomy. But he possessed a boundless enthusiasm and an unusual quickness of apprehension. He had much more than usual " literary " gift, and he was " romantic." He had also very enthusiastic friends.

IV

ROSSETTI now set about his first picture, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, which was completed early in 1849.

Its lines are a little rigid, a form of "preciosity"; its composition is unskilful because it was the work of a boy of twenty; its colouring is not that of a "colourist"; it is in almost every direction timid. But when everything is said and done it has wonderful charm; it is wonderfully refreshing; its rigid lines are, so to say, piquant; its colouring as pure as the air of an early morning, and the drawing is very good. Of its "literary" inspiration this much may be said: that it is of the type of creative realism attempting to apply poetic interpretation to history. As far as the present writer knows, there is not any hagiological account of the Virgin's early years: Rossetti's picture and his poem are Rossetti's attempt, working by analogy, to supply this and to apotheosize family life as he had known it. There are the symbols—the embroidery of the "Tripoint":

> *Perfect each,*
> *Except the second of its points to teach*
> *That Christ is not yet born. . . .*

there are the books inculcating the Virtues; the lily as the sign of innocence. The seven-thorn'd briar and the seven-leaved palm, symbols of sorrow and of reward "abide without." But these are introduced

with a *naïveté* and a directness that are touching instead of offensive.

We come then to the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*—the *Annunciation* of the National Gallery, a picture naturally more familiar. It "sets" the completing words of the sestet of the sonnet already quoted:

> *Till one dawn at home*
> *She woke in her white bed and felt no fear*
> *At all—yet wept till sunshine and felt awed:*
> *Because the fulness of her time was come.*

and is as fresh in treatment—in invention of the subject.

Before commencing it Rossetti had made a tour in France and Belgium with Mr. Holman Hunt: before he had finished it the "Germ" had tried to sprout and had died. The present writer cannot find that the former of these events had any immediate influence on his work.

Neither does the "Germ" call for much comment. It contained the first draft of the "Blessed Damozel" and a curious piece of autobiographic-psychological self-analysis called "Hand and Soul" which pretends to be a short story. It is, nevertheless, a not unimpressive human document.

The "Germ," like the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood itself, was an incident so much off Rossetti's real road as a painter that proportion in an essay of no great length demands that its *per se* interest, as well as that of the Brotherhood, should be carefully avoided. Neither of them were real factors in the career of Rossetti.

The "literary" machinery of the *Annunciation* is that of the *Girlhood of Mary Virgin*. It stands for ascetic mysticism in a purely human and non-religious sense. Its drawing is good, authentic: the drawing

of a man who knows at what he is aiming; who knows his limitations and works within them. It is a "symphony in whites," colours, such as the red of the lily-embroidery, serving only to emphasize the whiteness which in its day was an important point—a direct challenge to the school of painters on bitumen. It is refined; its telling points are selected ones; it is unburdened by detail; it is full of light and, in an æsthetic sense, it is chaste. What it most markedly is not is—classical; and its asceticism is neither restrained nor reposeful.

It also lacks robustness—a point worth making. Essentially, one's final criticism must be that Rossetti painted it recognizing his technical limits and working well within them. And, since the temperament expressed within those limits has distinction, fineness and nothing of commonness nor meanness, we may call the work a masterpiece.

Its most real value as a work of art lies in its catching, not of the religious but of the human, emotions of the Virgin—of a young girl confronted by one of the great moments of life. It exists and will probably continue to exist, on that account rather than on any other—as a piece of typical life observed and rendered, rather than an illustration of a literary incident.

In the immediately succeeding years Rossetti strove very earnestly, in the midst of all sorts of material checks and hindrances, to widen his limits—to stretch his capabilities to the very utmost. It is a little difficult to give a correct idea of the chronology of his works at that time. Before commencing—or perhaps at the time of conceiving the idea of—the *Annunciation*, Rossetti had designed an ambitious work, containing many figures, called *Hist, said Kate the Queen.* At that date he was bent on producing what one calls historic, or at least anecdotic, pictures.

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THE LABORATORY.

He retained the ambition for many years. Of these works he painted sketches or made pen and ink drawings, awaiting a commission before finishing them; but patrons came too late for any specimen of this phase of his art to reach completion. A water-colour sketch of *Kate the Queen* remains. It was finished between 1850 and 1853. It strikes the present writer as showing, more than any other of Rossetti's works the influence of the then Madox Brown. There is the same crowding of figures, the same rather timidly felt mediæval architecture, the same simplicity of colouring and the same flatness of "modelling." The figures have the appearance of having been *repoussés* upon cardboard that is to be found in Madox Brown's pictures of that date, and to a gradually lessening extent later on. It is a quality quite distinct from the absolute flatness of Mr. Hunt's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Immediately after this came the pen and ink of *Dante drawing an angel from the memory of Beatrice* (which is interesting as being his first illustration of the *Vita Nuova*) and the water-colour *The Laboratory*, his second subject from Browning. It represents a court lady watching a chemist prepare a "drop" with which she shall poison a rival beauty. As a picture this presents many points of interest. In the first place it is his first in which a moment of intense passion is intended to be presented. This note is particularly worth making because the essentially dramatic spirit of Rossetti found, as it happens, little opportunity either for expression or for recognition. In the second place the costumes are Georgian and not mediæval. The woman, of a full-bodied, not very intellectual type, springing out of her chair and clenching her hands is also noticeable, whilst the whole atmosphere of the picture is one of illicit passion in a

closed place. The picture, it has been frequently said, has the "look" of a Madox Brown. If this be so it is a curious piece of forecasting by Rossetti of a stage of Brown's art that had yet to come. What the older artist was at that date painting had a "look" quite different. The colour of the *Laboratory* is rich, even brilliant—showing perhaps the influence of some pictures seen during Rossetti's foreign tour. If this be so, the influence was that of Van Eyck, or even Pourbus (in Bruges) more probably than that of Memmline.

It is, however, undesirable to attempt to discover too much from this work. The dates of its execution —commencement, completion and retouchings—are very uncertain; and, what is more to the purpose, Rossetti's knowledge of water-colours as a means of expression was so infinitesimal at that date that both "look" and colour may be largely accidental. (The *Saluto de Beatrice*, for instance, of 1849–51 was painted over a pen and ink drawing.) With a pencil Rossetti was extremely skilful. There is in the sketch for *Benedick and Beatrice*, 1850, a figure of a man at a table (a sort of mediæval combed and oiled dilettante) that is most inspiriting in its seizure of dramatic character and freedom of motion. But good drawing in a water-colour, from the mere quality of the medium, is appreciably more difficult to attain to. Rossetti came remarkably near it in a little figure called *Rosso vestita* that remained in the possession of Madox Brown until his death. It would seem to have been the first portrait of Miss Siddal, and catches with great happiness the sort of proud, rather aloof gesture of that singular figure of charm—who, in externals, was markedly swan-like. The colour of *Rosso vestita* is, of course, reddish and yellowish-red in tones, sumptuous and quite "satisfying."

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MISS SIDDALL.

Miss Siddal (or Siddall), whom Rossetti met first in 1850, merits a few words as far as her influence upon Rossetti's art goes. She had been an "assistant in a bonnetmaker's shop in Cranborne Alley" before Rossetti saw her sitting to Walter Deverell for the head of Viola in *Twelfth Night*. The story of Rossetti's passion for her is too well known to need much attention from the present writer at this juncture. What is important is that her shape, gestures and hair, if to a less extent her features and expression, definitely fixed for Rossetti the type of woman that was to become his central figure. Hitherto he had painted his sister Christina (altering the colour of her hair), or as in the case of the woman in the *Laboratory* and in *Kate the Queen*, had apparently tried various female types then more or less "fashionable."

In the water-colour of *Beatrice at the Wedding-Feast denying her salutation to Dante* (1851), she is painted as the Beatrice; a haut beauty with half-closed eyes and a pose of forbidding drawing-back. This composition, full of faults, is full of charm; it is full of freshness; *too* full of figures and of detail. And in all these things it marks the opening of a new period for Rossetti. As an "achievement" it is more desirable than, say, the later *Giotto painting Dante*, or *Dante drawing the angel.*

But none of the works of those eight years or so ought to be regarded as achievements. One can only get at their real charm by considering them as first drafts—by being to their faults more than a little blind. Otherwise—and there is no good purpose to be served in shirking the expression—only too many of the figures are doll-like, only too many of the compositions wilfully and pragmatically over-burdened by symbolic or anecdotic accessories. It is as conceptions that, their revolutionary and literary value apart, they

are really significant. How gorgeous, for instance, and how wholly satisfying the *Borgia* of 1851 might have been made, with its charming attitudes of the children dancing in the foreground and the sumptuous and wonderfully realized figure of Lucrezia! As it stands, the children are a little "queer" in drawing; the dress of Lucrezia is flattened, or rather, was never modelled. Yet the dramatic suggestiveness is more than wonderful.

(The pen and ink design of *How they met themselves*, the present writer cannot claim to have seen; it has disappeared and one loses a desirable opportunity of comparing an early conception with the water-colour of nine or ten years later.) The water-colour *Giotto painting the portrait of Dante* has all these technical faults; the composition is crowded; there is practically nothing that leads the eye anywhere in particular; the drawing is awkward and there is a tremendous profusion of anecdotic idea. Giotto paints the celebrated portrait; Cimabue envies him; Dante sits, Cavalcanti envies *him;* Beatrice passes by and Dante loses himself in contemplation of her. The painting has become more skilful, and perhaps on that account the picture is less satisfactory than, say, the *Borgia.* It leaves less open to the imagination.

Even at this early stage of his work, when his technical powers were immature in the extreme, it was beginning to become evident that Rossetti's real gift, his essential talent, was that of catching emotions; of giving convincing renderings of moments of passion that he had really seen; of hitting off the salient characteristics of a typical model. The portrait of his grandfather Polidori is convincing and valuable as an interpretation of an old man; the girl in the *Annunciation* as a young girl, and the passionate woman and passionless alchemist of the *Laboratory* as

human beings in a moment of stress. He could also indicate an "atmosphere" with great skill and sympathy. It was probably owing to the influence of Madox Brown that he was so intent, in his pictures, on relating an anecdote of a historic kind. Or, at least, the "historic picture" was very much in the air.

V

EARLY in 1853 Rossetti wrote to his father that he had decided definitely to abandon verse-writing and pay more earnest attention to his profession—that of painting. His father had been begging him to regard very seriously the precariousness of his material prospects. There was more than sufficient appropriateness in the request. Rossetti at the opening of 1853 had sold but one picture—the *Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, which had been purchased by one of the aristocratic friends of his aunt, Miss Polidori. He had no private means, and the *Annunciation* steadily failed to get sold.

At almost exactly the same time that he had asked Madox Brown's offices as teacher, he had written to Leigh Hunt enclosing some of his verses in the letter. Leigh Hunt had replied, whilst sincerely and discerningly praising the verse, that Rossetti should most certainly rely upon his brush for a livelihood :

"I guess indeed that you are altogether not so musical"—he is referring to metrical faults—"as pictorial. . . . I know not what sort of a painter you are. If you paint as well as you write, you may be a rich man. . . . But I need hardly tell you that poetry, even the very best—nay, the best in this case is apt to be the worst—is not a thing for a man to live on while he is in the flesh, however immortal it may render him in spirit. . . ."

Rossetti, by the year 1853, had already written (at

least the first drafts of) "Dante at Verona," "Jenny," "Wellington's Funeral," and one or two ballads like "Stratton Water" and "The Staff and Scrip." The early version of the "Blessed Damozel" had appeared in the "Germ"; that of "Sister Helen" which was written in 1851, in a German magazine. The influences of these years in literature were very similar, it will be observed, to those shown in the subjects of his picture. "Dante at Verona" is, of course, a product of his study of the *Vita Nuova;* as are the subjects of the *Salutations of Beatrice* and the later *Dante drawing an Angel.* "Stratton Water" shows that he was already turning his attention to English more or less mediæval ballads; the "Staff and Scrip" forecasts his rendering of Arthurian subjects in picture.

As a matter of fact in the architecture, tools, and even in the clothes of his pictures up till this time there had not been so *very* much of mediævalism—of these strikingly and laboriously conceived accessories, banners, beds, hangings, vessels and carved woodwork that so elaborately decorate his subsequent works. In the *Annunciation*, the *Beatrice denying her salutation*, the costumes are merely simple gowns; those of the *Laboratory*, as has been remarked, are of the eighteenth century. In the *Borgia* there is the elaborately puffed and knotted costume of Lucrezia, and in the *Giotto painting Dante's portrait* the costumes are appropriate. Even this, however, is different in spirit to the gorgeous "decorative" profusion of the later *Tune of Seven Towers* or the *Blue Closet*, and was hardly more than the product of a desire for some sort of historic verisimilitude. To foster this particular bent Rossetti needed both patrons and encouragement. These, at this particularly critical stage of his material career he suddenly found.

Very shortly after he had played—to the extent of

seeking a post as telegraph clerk on the Great Northern Railway, and of actually trying to master the difficulties of a telegraphic machine—with the idea of abandoning both poetry and painting, M'Cracken, a Belfast merchant, was attracted to Rossetti by the joint devices of Madox Brown and Holman Hunt. He owned specimens of the works of both these painters, and by their recommendation decided to purchase the *Annunciation*—which from its long unsaleability Rossetti had nicknamed "the blessed white eyesore."

Mr. M'Cracken afterwards purchased, in April 1854, the water-colour *Dante drawing an angel in memory of Beatrice*, and this work (which is technically a rather more elaborate *Giotto painting Dante*) brought Rossetti through M'Cracken into contact with Mr. Ruskin. "M'Cracken," says Rossetti, "of course sent my drawing to Ruskin, who the other day wrote me a most incredible letter, remaining mine respectfully (! !) and wanting to call."

The eminent rhetorician's connexion with Rossetti was in many ways curious; in many ways singularly noble and disinterested.

It is of course easy enough to dismiss Mr. Ruskin with a shrug. His violence, his overbearingness, his ungenerousness as an art-critic, his over-emphasized asceticism and his continual falsification of æsthetic standards to give body to his ethical doctrine—his entire want of subtlety, in fact—have made him appear to-day as an almost dangerously one-sided Old Man of the Sea of Art. But, in the case of Rossetti—and more particularly of the Rossetti of this date—his services cannot be over-valued. The worst that can be said of his influence is that he helped to exaggerate what Rossetti himself was beginning to exaggerate. His profuse generosity made his influence in this way the more dangerous.

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FOUND. (THE ORIGINAL DESIGN.)

What, however, Rossetti absolutely needed was a patron with a ready purse and with readier sympathies, and this in Ruskin he had found. One should remember too the immense moral support; the immense encouragement to persevere. Mr. Ruskin, then, was the man who could make or mar, the great dispenser of sunshine or shadow over painters' careers. And he not only proclaimed Rossetti to the world; he bought a great quantity of work at Rossetti's own price and gave him to understand that he would be Rossetti's permanent stand-by as a purchaser.

The relationship of the two men was not, of course, permanent; in the nature of things it could not be. They must both be regarded as great romantic figures —Rossetti with perhaps an over-sweetening of sensualism; Ruskin with undoubtedly a Puritanic over-strenuousness of moral purpose in his æsthetic teaching. And the inevitable law of compensation demands that, great as may be the attraction for each other of most romantic figures, it in the end tends to pall. Thus, after a time, Ruskin definitely fell foul of Rossetti's luxuriance; and Rossetti saw that his own magnificence was too precious a thing to be sacrificed for ever to Ruskin's personal feelings. But in 1853 it was as if the taking on of these new ties meant the shaking loose of most of the old. All the original Pre-Raphaelite body had dissolved; Woolner was in Australia; Holman Hunt sailed for Palestine and Millais was elected "A.R.A." on almost the same day in November—Rossetti comments on the facts in a Tennysonian-Arthurian line:

So now the whole Round Table is dissolved,

which is almost symbolic of his new road. Madox Brown remained a close and intimate friend; and the friendship was undoubtedly tightened by the fact that

Mrs. Brown and Miss Siddal discovered an "elective affinity" one for the other.

The deepening of Rossetti's taste for mediæval accessories has already been spoken of, and this characteristic becomes extremely stronger in the water-colour of *Dante drawing an angel in memory of Beatrice*, which in "look" is the companion picture of the *Giotto*. The desire to fill up every corner with something—symbolic if possible—leads to the introduction of a row of seraphs' heads; a Madonna and Child; a mirror; an hour-glass; a pomegranate; many other tools; an architectural landscape seen through a window; a doorway; a corridor and piece of an ordered garden. These, however, are in the composition still subordinated to the general effect; they are introduced to give the local colour rather than to produce a decorative atmosphere. The figures are flat and the faces sculpturesque; the colour in places crude and in general not very harmonious. The dramatic feeling is of the intense or suspended kind. The drawing is rather feeble: the composition is confused. In this it is in strong contrast to the violent motion of the *Hesterna Rosa* of the same year. This is a really notable piece of work, distinguished by a great wind, as it were, of passion which sweeps through the pictured place and violently disturbs two at least of the figures. That of the lover of the remorse-stricken lady is wonderfully put upon paper, and the grim lesson is driven home by the contrasted figures of the ape and the little girl.

This last is in another way interesting; in it may be found the first instance of a distinct type of attitude that was afterwards so characteristic of Rossetti—the pose of the head and preoccupied, rapt expression peculiar to the listener to sounds inaudible to others. It has the stillness of anxious silence; the straining not to

Autotype.

STUDY FOR "FOUND.

miss ; a kind of momentary suspense in the midst of intense emotion. In this, its first instance, it is merely an observation and a record of a characteristic attitude ; but Rossetti afterwards became extremely fond of it and used it so frequently that it came to be almost the sole stock-in-trade of his many imitators.

The dramatic idea of the *Hesterna Rosa* is repeated in the drawing of *Found*, which was executed in the winter of 1853–4, principally at the house of Madox Brown at Finchley. This is Rossetti's solitary picture of modern life. In the pencil-drawing it is full of an actuality which has somewhat disappeared in the oil painting. It was the sort of subject very much in the air at that date. Rossetti himself had treated it less sentimentally in his poem of " Jenny," a much earlier production ; Mr. Hunt has attacked it in the *Soul's Awakening ;* Mr. Meredith to some extent in " Rhoda Fleming " ; Mr. Bell Scott considered that the chief credit of the idea was due to himself because he too had written a poem on the same subject. Thus, as has been pointed out, the picture possesses extraneous interest as " an extremely interesting document on the Victorian spirit of the period." It shows at least that Rossetti was not in any sense dead to the problems of his present.

Regarded as a conception the drawing shows a good deal of the influence of the Madox Brown of *Work ;* its simplicity and power are very much greater than those of *Hesterna Rosa* and it narrates its anecdote more directly. The air of abandonment of the woman is tragic and natural ; the man is a little more exaggerated and more forceful than one likes. There is a similar, slightly theatrical, exaggeration of attitude in the Launcelot of *Arthur's Tomb* of 1854 ; his crouching, rapt approach and intense gaze are as unconvincing if not as disagreeable as the violence of

the farmer in *Found*. But here again the renunciation and penitence of Guinevere is dramatic and true. Certain *gaucheries* and extravagances—such as the shield of Launcelot projecting backwards like a beetle's wing-case and the ungraceful lines of Guinevere's coif and figure—apart, this little drawing has a great charm of freshness. Its simplicity seems to the present writer to make it superior to most of its immediate predecessors, and with a little good-will one may close one's eyes to its technical shortcomings. It renders very simply the green youth of the world; a freshness of flat tints; a cleanness of atmosphere—what, in short, one may term "poetry." All this charm, all this freshness, and all this poetry without any of these defects are present in the first design of the triptych of *Paolo and Francesca* of 1855.

Had the present writer to choose three designs by which to let Rossetti go down to posterity, he would select *The Annunciation*, one or other of the versions of this drawing, and either the *Beloved* or the *Loving Cup* of later years. As a conception of Love in its early stages the *Paolo and Francesca* need not much fear any comparisons.

The two poor lovers, the large and fatal book upon their knees, have been the one learning, the other teaching. There is a window and bright light behind them. And the definite moment has come and is passing. It is perhaps because that definite moment is so essential, so great, and so necessary a moment in the lives of all men that the picture moves into a plane where technical details, mediæval atmospheres, clothes and what one will, matter very little. And it is because Rossetti has in it spoken so sweetly and so well that one may hope for him a place somewhere among the poets. He had a habit of indulging himself in all emotions that he, and more particularly his friends,

F. Hollyer.

PAOLO AND FRANCESCA.

liked ;—but here at least he has touched one of the strings that set vibrating every one's sympathies.

One may feel unconvinced by the picture of retribution—of the two figures in the snow-flames—perhaps because one does not feel convinced of the original sin. But there is no getting away from the love, the surrender, the moment at the top of a wave of the emotions.

By comparison, the *Dante's Dream* may leave one cold enough to observe flaws and drawbacks—the sudden introduction of round, and other shaped, little stained windows, distracting to the eye ; of a beautiful Beatrice with an ugly-drawn arm, of a Dante without much expression ; of rather commonplace and singularly unemotional attendant ladies. The angel's is perhaps the most convincing figure.

Dante's Dream is perhaps Rossetti's most ambitious composition, but set beside the *Paolo and Francesca* it is comparatively a failure. It is the duty of a work of art to come, so to speak, out of its frame and seize one ; to ask for no concessions to its mood; to convince the most stubborn; to overwhelm; to convince. This the little water-colour does; the larger one does not.

If one likes to sit down before it for a time the latter will say something ; and it may say more and more the longer one sits—a quality that some works of Botticelli are said to possess. But the *Dante's Dream* does not arrest ; one's surrender to it is voluntary.

The failure is in the technical carrying out, not in the dramatic conception ; in the projection rather than in the idea. The picture in fact is awkward and angular in its figures and architectural lines which are mainly vertical or horizontal, whilst the angel is diagonal. And the eye does not feel instinctively where to begin.

One may without any hesitation lose oneself in

admiration for the way in which the poem is illustrated; for the mind which could realize for us so vividly a scene, so memorable in the history of the intellect of man. The fact remains that, after having seen the picture, this episode of Dante's life must be visualized by men of our time, in a place and with figures like those of Rossetti's. And this implies a great deal.

The *Dante's Dream* was closely followed by a little water-colour called *Fra Pace* whose quaint, joyous grotesquenesses merit a moment's consideration. It has a good deal of the look of a later design by Madox Brown—*The Death of Sir Tristram*. This latter we know was an attempt to justify the lighting of mediæval illuminations and, incidentally by its grotesqueness to "touch the Philistine on the raw." Rossetti's *Fra Pace* seems to be something similar. It is flat, brilliant in colour and quite too quaint for Rossetti to have regarded it as more than a semi-humorous touching of somebody "on the raw." (Incidentally it may be said to have done as much for Ruskin.) It serves, very desirably, to point the moral that Rossetti had a continual flow of humour at command. The boy, who is tickling the cat whilst his master the Fra has entirely forgotten the world in painting a mouse, is a genial pleasantry rather in the vein of Madox Brown—and rather in the vein of that one-half of Rossetti's mind that persistently made fun of his own more "intense" moods.

During the years 1855–7 Rossetti was engaged upon a number of illustrations which have secured a great deal of attention. Somewhat earlier he had made the acquaintance of William Allingham the Irish poet, author of the more than charming "Up the airy mountains." For Allingham's "Maids of Elfin Mere" Rossetti made the almost famous drawing that is said to have made Burne-Jones become a painter and

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DESIGN FOR A BALLAD.

William Morris a decorator. The Dalziel woodcut of this has strengths and weaknesses that cannot have been in Rossetti's original design. The pencil drawing of the subject in the possession of Dr. Spence Watson, if more frail in touch, has infinitely more charm in its frailty—its kind of "Celtic glamour."

This drawing was made in 1855. During the winter 1856–7 Rossetti made the almost equally well-known drawings for the Moxon Tennyson. In one of those for the "Palace of Art"—a lady playing in a field on an instrument like a regal—we may undoubtedly trace the germ of Burne-Jones' *Chant d'Amour;* in the drawing of queens with their conventionalized crowns, robes and attitudes we may almost as undoubtedly trace a very early stage of what it is convenient to call "decorative" feeling.

A *Design for a Ballad* contains two excellently imagined and passionate figures of women embracing. It also contains, in dimly touched pencillings, the whole germ of the low, straightly-carpentered, rather than architectural, small rooms and closets into which for some years afterwards Rossetti delighted to cramp the figures of so many of his most delightful Arthurian and Ballad subjects.

Rossetti had now become, what he was to remain practically for the rest of his life, a "literary" or educated painter. He drew his subjects not from life itself but from one or other example of a fairly wide but quite specialized type of poetic and quasi-mystical literature. He more or less definitely proclaimed that he did not care to appeal to anyone not sufficiently educated to have an intimate acquaintance with those books. It was this characteristic that, in later years, was to distinguish him from all other painters. It also limited the range of his appeal.

VI

HERE then at the turn of the year 1856–7 we come to the opening of a very definite stage in Rossetti's art-work. It was from about this time until about 1862–3 that he was to design that series of very charming works that it is convenient to call, more or less, decorative.

It is profitable then to consider the men with whom he was, or was to come, in contact. Hitherto he had known more or less intimately the early Pre-Raphaelites, Madox Brown and Ruskin; to a less extent Coventry Patmore, the Brownings, Tennyson, as well as William Allingham, to whom he had written many letters full of frankness, gossip, charm, and his own individuality.

Ruskin, it may be said, was beginning to make himself already a little burdensome. He had no appreciation for the *Fra Pace* drawing and was to fall definitely foul of a *St. Katherine* of 1857. In the absence of Rossetti from his studio he called, and, seeing this picture, violently abused it to Rossetti's maid-servant. It should not be imagined, however, that this particular episode irritated Rossetti to anything like quarrelling-pitch. It was in fact the "current coin" of their intercourse; but any long strain of the kind to a man now approaching thirty and beginning to be aware of strong passions, must prove destructive to intimacy, though not to esteem, regard and gratitude. "Love," in fact, "that is too hot and strong, burneth soon to waste."

With Allingham, Rossetti continued for many years to be on good terms; Allingham was a man with whom it wasn't very easy to quarrel blackly. And the fact that Allingham was an Irishman, and, what is more to the purpose, an Irish poet and friend of the little good people of Erse legends, brings one to a momentary consideration of the "Celtic glamour" and of those Arthurian legends that were beginning to mean so much to Rossetti. One is open to the doubt whether before this time Rossetti had ever seriously "read in" Malory. It is more probable that his *Arthur's Tomb* was in a manner a sequel to Tennyson's "Mort d'Arthur" which was published in 1842—a sequel that he had evolved from his imagination, just as his earliest picture was a sort of prelude to the Scriptural Virgin Mary. (The present writer, at least, is not aware that any such episode as this meeting of Launcelot and Guinevere is to be found in Malory.) The mediæval Romancist and Knight's vast embodiment of Celtic legends in French-English chivalric terms was a piece of work with which Rossetti himself had hitherto been not at all in sympathy.

In the light of modern insistence on race problems in folk-lore and legend there is something rather piquant in a state of things that brought a Dante-influenced Romantic thus strongly under the spell of Latinized-chivalric Celtic legends. It sets to the student of such things a problem in derivations that must afford plenty of bewilderment.

The immediate nursing medium—the "soup," to use a term that bacteriologists apply to the liquor in which they cultivate bacilli—was the coterie of young Oxford men of whose names "William Morris" and "Burne-Jones" spring most readily to the lips. These are the latter-day "Pre-Raphaelites"—a false

name that should be always written the "Aesthetes." Burne-Jones had, quite early in 1856, written to Rossetti much such a letter as Rossetti had written to Madox Brown—and the letter was duly followed by a call and the exhibition of pen and ink drawings by Jones. The acquaintance led to that with William Morris. Both young men were then undergraduates at Oxford.

This University Rossetti had already visited, going there in or before July 1855 more or less because Miss Siddal was there on a visit. Both of them had been received with great cordiality by Oxford society, and Woodward, a latter-day Gothic-mediæval architect, had asked Rossetti to do "some designing" for the Oxford Museum that Woodward was then building. This plan came to nothing, but the idea was revived and began to be carried out when towards August 1857 Rossetti went down to Oxford to commence the celebrated vanished frescoes in the Debating Hall of the Oxford Union. Here the new friendship with Burne-Jones and Morris very definitely became an extremely close union.

In æsthetic movements of this kind it must always remain more or less unprofitable to attempt to state who was the originating and guiding influence. It would be quite just to say that Morris was the heart and soul of the Aesthetic Movement; it would be equally just to say that Rossetti was a great and generous figure in it. To say much more would be gratuitous in one concerned more with works than workers. Mr. William Rossetti, who cannot more than the present writer be suspected of partiality, has summed the matter up in the following words:—

"In fact Rossetti was now in the position of what the French term a *chef d'Ecole*. He had not only borne a leading part in founding and guiding the

F. Hollyer.

SIR TRISTRAM AND LA BELLE YSEULT.

Praeraphaelite movement, but he had formed a totally different group of believing admirers in Oxford University. . . ."

Of other men and women whom Rossetti met at Oxford, Swinburne and the later Mrs. Morris should be mentioned. Swinburne, a poet as far excelling Rossetti in the technique of verse-making as Millais excelled him in that of picture-making, did not much influence Rossetti except by the sustenance of his enthusiasm. Mrs. Morris, on the other hand, should be mentioned for the immense influence her brilliant and marked beauty had upon Rossetti's subsequent ideals of womanly types.

What is after all important in the matter is that here at Oxford he came again into contact with enthusiasms, with prodigality and the inestimable gift of youth. He was, moreover, beginning to make an income that was sufficient for needs and ease. He had already, through the influence of Mr. Seddon the architect, been commissioned to execute the altar-piece at Llandaff Cathedral—a work that in 1864 was completed as the triptych of the *Seed of David*. Various other patrons, including Morris himself, were beginning to make an appearance.

One of the earliest of his new products in the mood of Malory was his study of the *Damsel of the Sancrael*, a single figure, rather rigid, with a dove above it and a curiously straight and stiff napkin, but with both actuality and charm in the poise of the head. Of the frescoes executed by Rossetti in the Oxford hall practically nothing is now distinguishable ; dust and the flaking off of the quite unprepared ground have carried away or buried nearly all traces. It might be possible by comparing Mr. Treffrey Dunn's copy with the original of *Launcelot asleep before the Shrine*, to get some idea of the work itself, but this the present

writer has had no opportunity of doing. Of studies for this fresco perhaps that for Guenevere is the most altogether satisfying thing of its kind that Rossetti ever did. The pose of the figure, leaning back with arms outstretched along the forks of an apple-tree, is as supple as can be desired. The model was Miss Siddal, and the rendering of her as looking rather contemplatively and without emotion at her sleeping lover is both dramatically true and naturally convincing. That for the sleeping Launcelot himself is a strongly projected and unaffectedly observed study of extreme muscular exhaustion. It is in such figures as this and that of Tennyson reading his "Maude" at the Brownings' that one can see how direct and vigorous Rossetti could be. The real trouble was that other people did not want him to develop this side of his individuality. It came out strongly enough in the design of *Breuse sans Pitié* of the same year. In this there is violent, almost primæval combat, a grisly corpse hung up by the neck and a good deal of "human nature." There was the same in the study of *Two Men fighting for a Lady*, of a later date. But Rossetti was not encouraged to persevere in these endeavours.

He fell back upon the distinctively decorative. Among the designs for the Oxford Union is one in pencil of Sir Galahad and Sir Percival receiving the Graal. This was intended for a confined, low space with two round lights in it. Accordingly Sir Galahad and Sir Percival advance in the fashion of a dance-chain, one behind the other, hand in hand, with bent heads and bowed backs to conform to the lowness of the space, and with their arms and cloaks making arches, so to speak, in which are the lights.

This, as far as the present writer knows, was Rossetti's first attempt at that definite fitting of a design to a circumscribed, prescribed place that is

called Applied Art. From one critical point of view it may be held that all art should be decorative; from another a decorative "look" in a picture is said to be a distinct negation of all virtue. *L'un et l'autre*, in fact, *se disent*. It may be desirable to attempt to discriminate between the two standpoints—to find that middle way in which we may go safest.

Rossetti made four extremely charming little water-colours—one may say the four most charming of his works of this period—*The Blue Closet*, *The Wedding of St. George*, the *Christmas Carol* and *The Tune of Seven Towers*, "whose names are four sweet symphonies." These works—let it once again be said that they are most charming—all have the decorative feeling harped and reharped upon. In the *Blue Closet* there is a positive riot of ornamental tilework, which, if it enhances the feeling, distracts the eye. In the *Wedding of St. George* there are scutcheons, decorative straw work on chairs, ornaments of which the present writer knows neither the name nor the purpose. In the *Christmas Carol* there are a number of objects, such as have become familiar at the Arts and Crafts exhibitions, in a cupboard above the head of the central figure; a musical instrument answering to no known name but having a very ornamental look. In *The Tune of Seven Towers* all these things are exaggeratedly present and, in addition, a pennon-staff cuts nearly diagonally across the foreground of the picture. Its introduction seems to be quite arbitrary unless it be meant to account for the pennon itself which hangs down one side of the composition. If this latter be the case the pennon might have been considered as hanging from the roof beams and the fact left to the observer's imagination.

Now if these works be intended for pictures—for pictures, that is, rendering an aspect of human life—

it may be said definitely that these obtrusive details are faults. If, on the other hand, these are intended to be decorative works—as indeed it may be postulated that they more or less are—it seems a solecism that they should be presented not as works of applied art, but as pictures pure and simple. It is idle to say that the works, say of the early Florentine artists, all have this decorative look; because these very works were intended not as pictures but *as* applied works. The Picture, in these early days, had no existence, hanging framed and isolated upon a wall. Artists painted upon coffers, taking into account the spaces occupied by locks; they painted upon walls, harmonizing their designs with the architectural lines. Their art, in fact, was "applied," and they themselves were in varying degrees craftsmen. To imitate therefore the look of these mediæval works in pictures intended to be seen as modern pictures are seen, is in essentials wrong. Rossetti, however, may be justified along certain lines—either that he did not mean these drawings to be taken as pictures, or that the accessories are introduced to create an atmosphere—to give local colour. The probability is that he had no particular desire to have them considered as decorations, and that he did wish to strike a particular note—not necessarily the mediæval one. [This seems to be more certainly the fact if it be taken into consideration that the two panels for the Red Lion Square house—the two *Salutations of Beatrice* of 1859—are in no particular sense decorative. Yet these ought surely to have been so. They were, when in place, united by the *Dantis Amor* design, which is decorative and symbolic in every sense. The fact is, that Rossetti probably had no settled opinion on this matter.]

Having said that a picture should be a picture, a piece of applied art, and that these designs halt

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DANTIS AMOR

between the two; having said that Rossetti probably intended them to be pictures, and was by one thing and another beguiled into so filling them with objects decorated, that the pictures look like pieces of decorative work—one may approach the works themselves. In the end the justification of a work of art lies in its charm, and all these water-colours have the abstract, inconsequent charm of the fairy-tale told in earnestness. It is a particular charm arising, perhaps, out of the very want of skill of the narrator—the charm of *naïveté*, that is. And the Rossetti of that day was *naïf*. One may, the other condemnation apart, pick a number of holes in each of these four designs. The distractingness of the decorative insistence has been already alluded to. Otherwise, each of the four compositions contains too many figures. In the *Christmas Carol* there is no actual need for either the woman who is combing the player's hair or for the other, who is reaching up to the cupboard; in the *Tune of Seven Towers* no need for either the rapt listener behind the chair, or the figure who leans through a little "sliding panel" to place an orange branch on a bed. These figures being introduced it became necessary to find them something to do. Consequently they comb hair and lay orange branches on beds. The desire for filling up space—an, at bottom, æsthetic desire—thus detracting even from the literary idea. These undoubtedly are defects. [And if it be necessary, others might be mentioned—the bad drawing of the figure behind the chair in the *Tune of Seven Towers*, for instance.] It is as well to put them on record before surrendering to the "charm" of the pictures.

It is as well to put them on record, because in certain classes of work the faults actually add to the charm. *Naïvetés*, when they are *naïvetés* and not

preciosity, are usually charming. In fairy-tales—and these works of Rossetti must be classed with fairy-tales—piquancy is gained by the contrast of the natural with the supernatural, as long as these contrasts are introduced single-heartedly. Surprise is, after all, the quality that gives charm to art.

When in Irish fairy-tales the Good People confer lasting prosperity on a household in return for a bowl of milk, or a wooden measure of meal; when in the *Legenda Aurea* St. Martin secures eternal bliss because he cut his cloak in half to share with a beggar; our imagination is touched and tickled by the contrast of the spiritually mystic bliss with the homely materialism of the good deed. Similar contrasts make the charm of these drawings of Rossetti. But *all* the things to be changed in the analogy must be changed.

It is not the literary spirit of the anecdotes visualized that gives the pictures their value. Nor is it merely the contrast of real people with preternatural decorations great though this effect may be. In the *Wedding of St. George*, for instance, there is wonderfully vital realism in the figure of the Princess Sabra. It is a rendering of a woman giving way finally and ecstatically to love; giving way after tremendous agony, suspense and uncertainty to whole and whole-souled bliss; and, as a rendering of a woman in the moment of the great Happy Ending of all romances it is as real and as vivid as Rossetti's drawing of Francesca da Rimini. This real and vital figure is contrasted with a quite idealized Italian-mediæval, golden Knight; with similarly conceived angels striking a row of little bells; with all sorts of mediæval things, and with a deliberately humorous dragon's head sticking out of a box.

Now, if this contrast had been willed, consciously and of malice prepense there would have been practi-

F. Hollyer.

THE SALUTATION OF BEATRICE.

cally no more "charm" than there is in a wilful anachronism—than in, say, Mark Twain's "Yankee at the Court of King Arthur," where dummy knights in armour are discomfited by electrified barbed-wire fencing, and a modern American perturbs King Arthur by preaching down chivalric ideals to the tune of nineteenth century morality.

The picture of the *Wedding of St. George* is the most charming of the four under consideration. But it is one that for the nonce is a little dangerous to analyse because it raises the whole great and very bewildering question of what is and is not legitimate in the portrayal of historic or legendary scenes—the question whether Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar" should be played by characters in trunk hose or in togas. The same "points," however, may be made in the other designs. In the *Christmas Carol*, for instance, the player's hands are astonishingly real and really play—as really as those of any modern harmonium player. The figure behind equally really reaches down something from a shelf—as really as a modern housemaid half-tiptoes to "get at" a pot of jam. It is the contrast of these realities with the half-wilful exaggerations of other parts of the pictures that give the "charm" of which so much more might be written without exhausting the subject.

What, however, these actualities of rendering seem to point to is that Rossetti really wished these pictures to be realistic renderings of things that *might* have happened in a certain age of twilight and legend in the world. He meant as far as he could, to make them true visualisings of a more or less definite past; and the infinitude of accessory imaginings was introduced to give local colour. It is as such that they charm us. As æsthetic conceptions they are perhaps not the highest art. That, as has been recorded,

arrests us whether we will or no. This, on the other hand, appeals very intimately only if we will let it do so; if we will enter the door which it holds open for us. And that, once more, is much. The fact is that during these and the ensuing years Rossetti was being subtly influenced towards "decorative" work. His nature and his circumstances made him absolutely need encouragement. He, unfortunately perhaps, was not one of those men who could for an indefinite length of time and whilst pursuing a definite line, face mental starvation. His abilities were many and various —perhaps too many and too various.

At a very early stage he had seemed to have every intention of becoming a religious-ascetic painter. He had planned, afterwards, complicated "machines" of historic art in the manner of Madox Brown's *Wickliffes* and *Chaucers*. Both of these styles he had to give up for want of patrons. When Ruskin "took him up" he had shown in the drawing of *Found* that he might have turned to the rendering of the actual. Ruskin forced him to display his abilities as a painter of Florentine chaste-mysticisms. In the *Breuse sans Pitié;* in the realism of *Fra Pace;* in the rather brutal head and vigorous action of the *Launcelot defending Guenevere's chamber;* and in the realistic parts of the pictures most lately under consideration there is evidence that he could, had fate and his friends so willed it, have been direct as well as actual, luxuriant as well as humorous.

He was, however, *chef d'école*—of a school that clamoured for his becoming quasi-mediævally decorative. And this, following for a time the line of least resistance, he became. He began, in fact, to supply the only demands that reached him.

The immediate results of this were that his luxuriance created ultra-elaboration, and his humour be-

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

came quaintness. [This is most immediately demonstrable in the head of the dragon in its box in the *Wedding of St. George*—a deliberate bit of exaggeration that is not very excusable and that Rossetti himself made fun of.] Left to himself at this stage he might have produced substantially the same designs and have introduced only just sufficient detail to fix the local colour. His followers, however, encouraged him to add decoration to decoration, minutiæ to minutiæ, and figure to figure. They were, of course, tending towards Morris, Marshall, Falkner & Co.

Rossetti himself, however, was in essence not a decorative craftsman. His actual applied work fell quite below the standard of Morris; his designs for stained glass were not as appropriate to their purpose as those of Madox Brown; the furniture that he painted in his pictures was much better than that he designed for his own use.

When, as has been said, he came to design door-panels for the house in Red Lion Square he painted definite pictures. The *Regina Cordium* panel of 1861 is a quite elaborately moulded nude head and shoulders with a gilt-screen-background. In the canon-rule for decorations of the sort it is laid down that mural decorations should have neither the appearance of standing out from the wall nor of being a window through which a landscape is seen. The wall, as wall, in fact, is to be respected. Rossetti, therefore, by painting a vivid rounded figure sinned against this canon; and it is as if he had attempted to atone for it by painting yet another wall on to the wall. His *King Réné's Honeymoon* panel for the Seddon cabinet is open to the same objection but in less degree; the *Annunciation* pulpit or altar-panel, also of 1861, is a rather inferior picture quite distinct from the *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. The fact is that however "decorative"

Rossetti's spirit may have been—or, however "decorative" his wonderfully alive sympathies may have let him for a time become, he never really mastered the rules of applied art. He gave it very little attention after 1862 or 1863.

To return to the actual pictures of this period. The four to which so much attention has been—quite deservedly—paid, together with the Oxford designs, occupied Rossetti until the end of 1857. In 1858 came a very "charming" pen and ink drawing of *Ophelia returning the gifts to Hamlet.* In this there are only the two figures of the tragedy; but in revenge there are too many details. Ophelia sits, as if overcome by a momentary faintness, in a sort of pew, the sides of which are carved after the fashion of the most elaborate chapter stalls. Behind, leaning over the pew doorway is the figure of Hamlet, a very fine conception, a little too large for the composition—or at least for the figure of Ophelia. Behind Hamlet again are various architectural whimsicalities—carved pillars and winding staircases. The drawing is noteworthy because here we come upon a definite first stage of a very much altered, very finely treated, and very considerably later, "historic" subject. This design in fact definitely became a water-colour in 1866. The latter though far from being a technically perfect work is as a picture-composition on another plane than the 1858 pen and ink drawing. Ophelia has risen to her feet and confronts Hamlet, a tall, dramatic figure of weak grief—quite a different person from the fainting girl of the earlier pew. The pew, the carvings, the architectural extravagances of the background have disappeared and, instead, the head of Hamlet stands out against shadows and gloom.

One characteristic that is rather marked in the Hamlet drawing of 1858 is the fact that Rossetti made

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OPHELIA RETURNING THE GIFTS TO HAMLET.

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HOW THEY MET THEMSELVES

little or no attempt to realize the scene historically. The period suggested by the accessories is neither that of Hamlet nor yet that of Shakespeare. The fact *per se* is not markedly interesting. But the added fact that Rossetti's *Magdalen at the door of Simon the Pharisee* of 1858 is a decoratively altered version of a similar design of 1856, shows to what an extent the mediæval influences overcame Rossetti's strong sense of dramatic fitness. This is a very crowded and very spirited design of an immense number of Italianized figures, and of its kind is certainly one of Rossetti's most remarkable works. It may be considered as the pendant of the *Cassandra* pen and ink drawing of 1861.

It is difficult to say why the latter subject should have appealed sufficiently intimately to Rossetti to make him desire to render it so much his own. It was probably the epic figure of Helen of Troy; or the epic tale portraying so vastly the dangers of the love of women. As a design it is a *tour de force*, but one which may command respect. The fine figure of Hector is, of course, conventional and not much touched by Rossetti's own individuality. That of Cassandra, if wanting in mystery and even in madness, is not essentially inadequate; and the idea of introducing the soldiers behind, as almost architectural and certainly decorative conventions, is ingenious.

But, on the whole, Rossetti commands most respect when working within the limits of his racial and temperamental sympathies, and when he went outside these, was not always even nearly dramatically successful. *The Princess Parisadé and the Golden Water*, for instance, from the "Arabian Nights," is in no sense a conception of an Oriental subject, and Rossetti probably had no great idea of making it one. What his sympathies were still absorbed by is well enough shown in the *Bocca Baciata* and *Lucrezia Borgia* of

the years 1859–61. In the *Lucrezia*, in the mirror near the left shoulder of the sumptuous woman is shown Lucrezia's husband, Duke Alfonso of Biscaglia, whom she has just poisoned and "who is being walked up and down the room by Pope Alexander IV., in order to settle the poison in his system." This device of narrating in a mirror the happenings in the part of the room occupied by the spectator—of thus completing the anecdote—was a trick much beloved by both Rossetti and Madox Brown. The latter had already adopted it in his *Take your son, sir*. In the *Lucrezia*, its use, dramatically speaking, is singularly effective and indeed admirable.

Two other designs of this period are worth mentioning whilst one is upon the subject of dramatic inspiration. Of the one *Dr. Johnson at the Mitre*, the first pen and ink design was made in 1860. The other, a pen and ink of *How they met themselves*, was made in the same year; it is a probably much-altered version of the design of 1851. The latter shows Rossetti's strong liking for subjects connected with the supernatural—his strong liking, because so very much of Rossetti's most fervent individuality is thrown into, and expressed in, this drawing of two lovers, who, walking in a wood, meet their *doppel-gaengers* and are lamentably stricken by the presage of approaching disaster. It is one of Rossetti's best designs.

The *Dr. Johnson at the Mitre* shows Rossetti as, what he really was, an excellent renderer of humorous character. The figures of the Doctor and of Boswell are quite wonderful "catchings" of historic characteristics; the two Methodist girls and the tired waiter, of the unhistoric. For what is called "the humorous *genre*," Rossetti had always a marked predilection. [He wanted to make a design of a number of nurse girls running a wheelbarrow race, the wheel-

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DR. JOHNSON AT THE MITRE.

barrows to contain babies, whilst the perturbed mothers should expostulate.] And that he had a great power of seizing salient personal characteristics, his portraits and such thumbnail sketches as that of Tennyson reading his " Maud," prove clearly enough. It may be called unfortunate that no purchaser ever encouraged him to complete either the *Johnson* or any other work of the kind.

But the *Johnson* proves, if proof were needed, that Rossetti could, when he pleased, " get atmospheres " quite radically different from the Italian, the Mediæval or Legendary. The whole suggestion of the eighteenth century, of the Mitre and of Boswell's " Life " ; of the faint touch of architecture which then meant chimney-pots and sky-line seen through windows of a peculiar " look,"—all these are caught along with the Doctor's great, uplifted finger, and great, planted foot ; his tea and Boswell's leer and toddy. It only exemplifies Rossetti's desire for a peculiar smallness of space, that he should have selected a coffee-room box into which to literally cramp his figures.

VII

AT about the end of 1862 Rossetti may be said to have been beginning to "find himself"—to find himself as he then was, not as he ought to have been had he not fallen under the sway of various influences, of various entourages and of various demands.

Miss Siddal he had married in 1860, ten years after he had first seen her. Her constant and violent attacks of ill-health and his own want of means had for so long put off the marriage. He undoubtedly loved her very tenderly, and her peculiar and marked beauty as undoubtedly reacted upon his sense of female charm, of lines, of expression and of poetry. She died in February 1862, and the circumstances of her death were very tragic; her death a violent and unanticipated one. It is impossible to draw a line between temperament and personality in art, and for that reason it would be idle to attempt to discover what influence this had upon Rossetti's art. Its effect upon Rossetti the man was marked enough.

With Ruskin he remained upon personal terms of cordiality, Ruskin paying for the production in 1861 of Rossetti's translations, "The Early Italian Poets," the payment being covered by the ultimate profits of the venture. Ruskin's admiration for Rossetti's pictures was, however, definitely beginning to disappear and he practically bought no more. Madox Brown remained, as he did till death, Rossetti's firm friend;

his influence on his work, however, had grown so faint as to have almost entirely disappeared. Morris, Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Madox Brown and two others had founded the "Firm" of Morris & Co. For this Rossetti furnished the few designs for stained glass and one for a tile, which have been already mentioned. The firm was lodged in Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury, in a large and rather noble Georgian house. It was used partly as a residence and partly as a sort of club where the members met, designed, dined, and very boisterously enjoyed life—a good and enjoyable life in which Morris figured as "Topsy," Burne-Jones as "Ned," Madox Brown as "Good Brown," to distinguish him from a skilful but toping "Bad Brown" whose business it was to "fire" the stained glass.

Of the personal characteristics of these men who founded a movement considerable enough, it is not the present writer's purpose to speak very fully. As a man Morris was hearty, irascible, good-humoured and assuredly attractive. Burne-Jones was small in physique, quietly humorous—with a continual twinkle in his eye. Madox Brown, the eldest of the four, was most learned in the sorrows of a sufficiently bitter life; but he had a geniality, a helpfulness and a practical good sense as well as a fund of good stories and modern instances. Rossetti himself was at that time well turned of thirty; brilliant, humorous, dark, of fine features, inclined to "a full habit of body," but especially light-hearted before his wife's death—the most picturesquely charming and romantic figure of them all.

The sort of anecdote that may stand to typefy their personal relations is the following: Mr. Arthur Hughes, then a young man, tied into all manner of small knots Mr. Morris's fine head of hair, Mr. Morris being at the time engaged in a violent discussion with

the other members of the firm. The intention was to see how violently Mr. Morris could be got to swear when he discovered the state of his hair.

The whole atmosphere of the club was one of a good comradeship, of high spirits and certainly of no kind either of formality or of "intenseness." In it all Rossetti took his full share. Customers were treated altogether on a "take it or leave it basis." In the actual art-work of the firm Morris certainly took the leading point. He was the essential craftsman—one is tempted to say both in letters and the plastic arts. Rossetti, on the other hand, probably very much influenced the "look" of what was produced—influenced it, as has been pointed out, by the tendencies of the accessories in his pictures and the attention he evoked for the derivations of these accessories. As has also been said, he did very little of the actual designing, what he did being nearly restricted to the designs for panels in the house itself in 1861 and the designs for stained glass of 1861–2.

He lived at this time, and with his wife until her death, in Chatham Place, near Blackfriars' Bridge; but after her death he found the place too painful for its associations, and by November 1862 [there had been an intermediate stage in chambers] he finally settled in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea—in the house that is so intimately bound up with the associations of his later life. This house he at first rented in common with Mr. Swinburne and Mr. George Meredith, the two chief poets of the end of the nineteenth century. By this time, that final stage of Rossetti's money circumstances, that feeling of having more than enough always in prospect to gratify any reasonable whim, was commencing. As time went on he became less and less dependent on the eulogiums of practising enthusiasts like Ruskin and Morris. He found definite

F. Hollyer.

JOAN OF ARC KISSING THE SWORD OF DELIVERANCE.

patrons like, firstly, Mr. Plint, who died very early, and then Mr. George Rae, who was quite as much " in sympathy " with, at least most sides of, Rossetti's art as any patron has ever been for any artist. Mr. Rae still holds a collection that, given to the world, must definitely and finally show what Rossetti really was. At later stages came Mr. Leathart, Mr. Leyland, Mr. Graham and many more occasional buyers. The fact that these art-lovers could be trusted to take whatever, within bounds, Rossetti chose or cared to produce, had probably more effect on the development of Rossetti's real self than anything else that could be mentioned.

At the fine house in Cheyne Walk, Rossetti for many years let his full enthusiasms have scope. He bought all sorts of furniture and accessories that in any way appealed to his imagination. His " scheme " in these matters was by no means coherent and was certainly not either " decorative " or anything else in particular. He bought " Chippendale " sideboards, glass-drop chandeliers, Dutch clocks, a profusion of mirrors of all styles, and one or two of considerable, tortuous ugliness ; and he " invented," along with M. M. Whistler and Tissot, the craze for blue china and Japanese art. He also bought hanging lamps from George IV.'s Pavilion at Brighton, and Zebu bulls, wombats, peacocks and a box-tree cut in the shape of an arm-chair from a Sussex garden. The fact is, really, that he had for some years an immense, childish, and quite charming delight in anything rich and strange ; a zest quite distinct from the " collector's," in that it was the product of a sort of sympathy with almost anything that was æsthetically striking, a human expression, or that appealed to strongly human idiosyncrasies. This remained the case for several years.

The last drawing in which, before her death, Rossetti used his wife as a model, was a water-colour of *St. George and the Princess Sabra*, a design similar in spirit to the other *St. George* subject and to those of the *Tune of Seven Towers* and the *Blue Closet*. He had, however, already in 1861 begun to come up out of this land—to show signs of it, at least in the *Fair Rosamond* of that year. This is a practically life-size head and shoulders of a woman [the pose something like that of the *Regina Cordium* already mentioned] with a highly emotional and dramatic, but not very spiritual expression. The painting is elaborate, careful, and extremely brilliant. The flesh rather lacks anything like that suggestion of translucency that gives to the flesh-painting of a master the qualities of actuality and charm.

The lady is Fair Rosamond by virtue of holding the cord, the clue, which is to lead the King to her—and the painting is interesting as a clue that leads one on to the later stages of Rossetti's work when Rossetti became a lyric rather than a dramatic painter, a painter rather of moods than of subjects. Other pictures that indicate what was coming are the replicas —two for instance of the *Paolo and Francesca* triptych, those of 1861 and 1862. These differ considerably in colour and somewhat in design. The two designs for Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* should be mentioned, because in the frontispiece, at least, Rossetti found for once a full outlet for his delight in quaintnesses of humour, of form, of profusion. The title-page drawing is one of his most individual in flowingness of line and sumptuous feeling, though the actual wood-cutting—Mr. Morris's 'prentice attempt—does, interesting as it is, detract from these qualities. Nevertheless drawings, title-page and book are things for which we cannot, in the nature of the arts, be too

BEATA BEATRIX (NATIONAL GALLERY).

thankful for. During all these years, Rossetti had a very great power of making very charming drawings with the pencil—drawings like those of Miss Siddal, the head of Mrs. Madox Brown and the posthumous portrait of Mrs. H. T. Wells, a thing of great delicacy and insight. It was during 1862 that he made what seems to have been his first pastel—the portrait of his mother.

All these things point the way in which he was going. His first painting after his wife's death was the oil *Girl at a lattice*, a semi-rustic beauty at a window. This was painted at Madox Brown's house at Hampstead; after that again, a very well-seen portrait of Mrs. Leathart, wife of the great picture-buyer; and then in the same year a *Joan of Arc kissing the Sword of Deliverance*. This is, in dramatic conception, a sort of pendant to the *Fair Rosamond*. It is a head and shoulders of the kneeling maid, and, if somewhat hard in painting, and, curiously enough, wanting in mysticism, is spirited and highly vigorous.

We come then almost immediately to the commencement of the *Beata Beatrix* of the National Gallery; and this picture is, upon the whole, Rossetti—the Rossetti that is apart from other men; the Rossetti who either did, or came very near doing, what other men have not done. It has its defects, but these may be left. And, if it be not a work of great, it is assuredly one of fine, intimate and appealing, art. One must take it as the outcome of a looking back, of a longing—as, in no degree of that more purposeful, vital, and in the large sense useful, spirit that after great losses, sealed by death, grows brighter.

Yet it is idle to desire black to be white; grey's being gold and green; twilight to be the noontide of Spring. The *Beata Beatrix* is, so to speak, a lyric; the setting in paint, of a mood. If it be—and it

must needs be called—true to its mood, it is almost all that we can ask of a man, of an artist. Its defects, as has been said, one may pass over. One does do so, more or less instinctively in fact, and this, after all, is the haven to be desired by every artist—that he should carry conviction home, that he should hypnotize, send to sleep, any spirit of carping.

The real secret of the charm of the *Beata Beatrix* lies in the fact that Rossetti was once again attempting something well within his powers both technically and spiritually. He had a remarkable gift of seizing what was characteristic in the pose of a figure and, just as he could give one an excellent rendering of a Tennyson reading or a Johnson emphasizing, so in this picture he has caught the poise of neck, closing of eyes, and repose of hand and limb of a woman who was a Beatrice. He has placed her against a brilliantly lighted window, setting himself a problem of lighting familiar to him. [It should be remembered that his painter's life was essentially an indoor one ; the lights that he principally must have noticed were shafts of light rather than full light from all sides.] He has perfectly abstained from any forcing of the note in the matter of details, and, though the design might, speaking very strictly, have been the better without the figures of Dante and Love, these are so inoffensively painted as to matter comparatively little.

One may, on the whole, say that the real reason for the success of the picture was, that Rossetti painted it to please himself rather than to fall in line with the things desired of him by Pre-Raphaelites, Mr. Ruskin or the Decoratives. It was an expression, made for himself, of his own personality in the mood of thinking of one dead. Its value lies in that.

This picture was not finished until 1865, and during the early and middle sixties Rossetti's productiveness

F. Hollyer.

DAVID, PASTOR (FROM THE LLANDAFF TRIPTYCH)

was most bewildering. It is, in a short essay, quite impracticable to do more than indicate the names of many of the projects or to touch with much adequacy on more than the most typical of the more considerable finished works. There is, for instance, the Llandaff triptych, *The Seed of David* which, begun in 1858, was definitely completed in 1864 (and retouched in 1869). This picture contains some very charming and memorable heads of angels, but the head of the Virgin, perhaps owing to the retouching, seems wanting in feeling. The figure of David the Shepherd is fine and vigorous but conventionalized. That of David the King is a quaint and rather grotesque conception of something strange and " Babylonish."

It was, moreover, during the early sixties that the seed sown by Rossetti in his innumerable early designs began to bear fruit in replicas, or rather in finished pictures, for which the early designs were the first projections. His continual retouchings which in some cases immeasurably improved the works and in others quite ruined them, also obscure the issues of his work during all these years. His employment of assistants to space out, commence and in all sorts of ways keep these replicas in progress, does not make the task any easier. Moreover, in one way and another, a certain number of forged Rossetti's, attributable to these dates and later, got into floating circulation. Hence somewhat of a maze.

It seems best, therefore, to the present writer to treat of Rossetti's works of the years, say 1863–1872, as being of one stage, of one level of attainment. One may take four of his large oil pictures as " heads "—the *Beloved*, the *Lilith* and, half-way between them, the *Aurea Catena* and then the *Loving Cup*. The heads are those of mood or inspiration rather than of technical execution. In this last Rossetti may be said

to have reached a definite level of method from which it is true he occasionally fell away disconcertingly. If in his early life he found inspiration in the Florentine early Italian painters, in this his maturity he was more or less definitely a Venetian. His painting had become heavy, sumptuous and assured in its own way; his drawing, always more or less uncertain, was good when no problems of perspective or foreshortening had to be assailed; his colour was particularly rich, and as a rule harmonious. The effects of light that he attempted were generally well within the range of his observation and sympathies (he never *much* bothered his head to catch the quiverings of bright sunlight, for instance), and such effects of *chiaroscuro* as he found desirable to employ were mostly well within his range. He more or less definitely abandoned the habit of crowding his figures into small, carpentered, square closets, and the other habit of worrying the eye with infinite devices rendering applied art-works.

Rossetti, if he is ever to be considered an "accomplished" painter, was so in this period of 1863–1870. His more considerable failures were mostly owing to exaggerations of mannerisms rather than, as before, to want of knowledge of his limits. And these exaggerations were very much due to his desire to enhance the rendering of one or other of his moods—to sentimentalism, in fact. Where he was not trying more hard than was fitting to be raptly mystical, mystically sensual or sensually rapt, his actual touch was generally as firm as he had it in him to make it.

His danger was always that in these special moods he might overdo the note. In the pursuit of these things he lengthened limbs and throats; forgot the proportions of arms; or, intent on accentuating in fingers the dramatic idea of the whole figure, "passed"

F. Hollyer

CENTRE OF THE LLANDAFF TRIPTYCH.

hands that were too big for the heads they belonged to. When, on the other hand, he was content to render pure beauty (as apart from its secret or mysticized forms), he was fairly sure of himself. And, when he was content thus merely to *render* without, as it were, insisting on his moral, he could go on touching, retouching and elaborating and generally improving his work.

Of this the *Beloved* or the *Bride* is a striking instance. This extremely beautiful work was begun in 1863, worked on at intervals for ten years, and finally altered in 1875. And it is fairly safe to say that every alteration that is traceable was an improvement. The reason is not far to seek. The *Bride*, although taking its title from the song of Solomon—which, as one knows, has had inner meanings and to spare read into it from time immemorial—is little more than a rendering and contrasting of beautiful types of woman. It is an apotheosis of feminine beauty, a sort of peacock's fan of women's heads. The central head, that of the Bride, is a fair and wonderfully pure type of face ; a rendering of the features of a Miss ——, but a rendering giving insight, explaining and expanding, a glowing piece of humanity in a moment of tranquil dawn-happiness. Relieving this, *Belle et blonde et coloriée*, are other typical women's heads : a Jewess' ; a gipsy's. In the foreground a little, lustrous negress holds a pot of flowers. There is a great deal of light in the picture.

There is no particular attempt to catch the spirit of the Canticle of Canticles ; and assuredly none to symbolify the " Bride, the Church." One may take it that the verses that went to its making are : " *As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. . . . She that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in*

array." It is because the idea is so simple, because nothing was there to be expressed other than beauty and a foil, that Rossetti was able to go on touching and retouching without spoiling it as a picture.

In the case of two others, the *Lilith* and the *Venus Vesticordia*, the retouching was more than disastrous. Lilith was the witch-wife of Adam; she stood for illicit love, for the women who bring sorrow to the Eves of this world and disaster to the hearth.

Rossetti painted at first what another writer has called "a woman whose flowering beauty is so superb as to leave the beholder quite indifferent as to what lies within her soul—even cruelty." The model, the type, was at least pagan in the sense of being, if not cruel, certainly remorseless in the pursuit of enjoyment. The head was excellently painted, the lines of the figure nobly conceived, the easy, voluptuous attitude finely observed and natural. This was painted in 1864. In 1872 he took it into his head to repaint the features; in forcing the note of corruption and what we now call *decadence*, he quite destroyed the real significance—the conviction—of both design and idea. The same thing happened to the *Venus Vesticordia.* The present work is uninteresting and may even be called repellent. Rossetti set out to paint two things—a Venus of Danger and a nude half-length. (He was either aware that he could not paint a nude full-length or was afraid of shocking susceptibilities. Perhaps both ideas were in his mind.) As the picture stands, a badly modelled and badly drawn girl's body rises head and shoulders out of a sort of bed of badly painted flowers. The head as it at present is is in no sense that of a Venus. It is not even alluring.

The picture is one that Rossetti took immense pains with. He spent vast sums on flowers to paint for the

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WASHING HANDS.

bed of blossom out of which the figure rises—sums so great that, as his letters show, he had to curtail his household expenses to pay for them. This was in 1864. The picture, the present writer must needs think, cannot ever have been a satisfying success. Indeed the amount of trouble spent on the flowers, which are after all accessories meant to enhance the local colour of rose-and-honeysuckle alluringness, betrays a suspicious method of "going at" the subject. The water-colour version, made at the same time, or as a preliminary sketch, is undoubtedly a better work, and serves, to some extent, to show how much the repainting of 1873 made the oil picture fall away. What these facts seem indisputably to point to, is how very dangerous to Rossetti, as painter pure and simple, was the literary idea, moral or mood, when he attempted to force it home.

When he was content, being in a certain mood, to observe and record, he was up to the limit of his powers successful; when he attempted to point his moral, to illustrate his mood, he was most liable to fail, and to fail by exaggerating. It was a question of getting hold of one or the other end of the stick. His actual mannerisms were very little at fault; not more so than those of any other artist.

There is for instance a head and shoulders of a *Dancing Girl* of about the year 1863, which is a quite pagan rendering of Bacchic motions. The hands, which are the typical "Rossetti" hands, really *hold* castanets and use them; the arms, which are the typical "Rossetti" arms, *are* really in violent movement. And again in the *Loving Cup*, which is assuredly one of the purest and most charming of Rossetti's works, there is a simple rendering of observed character, of almost virginal charm, reserve, motion and spontaneity, and at the same time there is no lack

of what one calls Rossetti-ism; of Rossetti's peculiar individuality of observation, of his poetry, in short.

Rossetti at his best was a painter in, not of, moods. He was most successful when, having recorded a type of feminine beauty—or even repulsiveness—he afterwards found a name for it; stood back in fact from his canvas and only then discovered the moral of what he had been painting. For this reason the present writer has called him a lyric painter. The more one considers his later works, the more evident this fact seems to become. When as in the *Joli Cœur* he is doing no more than presenting a rather sensual and quite young girl; when, as in the *Monna Vanna* a refined and delicately sensuous type; as in the *Lady with the Fan*, a more or less animal type; as in the *Lady with the Gold Chain*, a sort of odalisque; when he is passionlessly and clear-sightedly propounding varying sensual creatures, he is as technically successful as he is in the *Beloved* or the *Loving Cup*. Indeed in these two pastels of *Ladies* he reaches practically his highest in ease, forcibility of drawing and harmony of line. The present writer would be inclined to say that the *Aurea Catena* (the lady with the chain) is, technically, the best of all Rossetti's later work; one, at least, of which it is nearly impossible to grow tired. The modelling of the neck, which was a matter that Rossetti as if of set purpose neglected, is here satisfying; the drawing of the hands is entirely unaffected and natural; and the poise of the head, the expression, the way in which the quite simple dress is put on and the fall of the chain, are all alike wonderfully convincing. The leafage, as was generally the case in Rossetti's pastels, is solid and as motionless as carved leaves, and the lips are remotely "smudgy" and unrendered. Except for these slight drawbacks the pastel is a very wonderful one.

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LILITH.

Autotyp.

THE LOVING CUP (DRAWING)

In a rapid survey of the more important works up to, say, the end of 1871, mention should be made of the *Sibylla Palmifera* of 1864, a not altogether successful allegoric composition; of the extremely fine *Washing Hands*, a water-colour of a lady and a man in eighteenth century costume, one of Rossetti's most powerful designs; of a very charming oil picture *Il Ramoscello*, called also *Fair and Good*, painted in 1865 and retouched in 1873. One of the least successful and one of the most mystically "literary" of his designs is embodied in three oil paintings—the *Pandoras* of 1869, 1869–71, and 1875. None of these is much other than out of drawing, whilst the last version is actually distressing. The same remarks in a less accentuated degree apply to the *Donna della Finestra* (or the *Lady of Pity*), the crayon of 1869, a moderately fine work being painted in oil in 1878–9.

Of the replicas of 1864–1871, several are noteworthy. That of *How they met themselves*, of 1864, is exceptionally good in drawing and spirited in dramatic gesture. The water-colour of *Hesterna Rosa* of 1866 attacks successfully enough the problem of lamplight contending with the creeping in of the dawn. Another replica which was begun in 1869 and worked on at different times until 1881 is the large oil version of *Dante's Dream*, to which reference has already been made. This is in the Walker Art Gallery of Liverpool.

It should, however, be remembered that these remarks by no means exhaust the significance of Rossetti's work during these years. An immense body of it is to be found in small sketches, in portraits, and in designs for pictures which for one reason or another never came to completion. All these must be regarded as forming a rich background against which the larger works stand out more because of their size than of their preponderating value. These sketches are,

however, more valuable as indications of what might have been; as indications of the rich fertility of Rossetti's mind, than as the mere studies for heads, hands, drapery, nude figures, or armour, which form so considerable a part of the best work of other artists.

Rossetti's studies, broadly speaking, were only thumb-nail sketches, his finished pictures were frequently enough little more than the embodiment of "studies." This method of work had of course its advantages and disadvantages.

On the one hand, the pictures have the gain of the freshness of the studies themselves. And one knows how often in the works of artists the studies are better than the finished pictures. On the other hand, studies that might have been better left out, sometimes remained in the finished pictures because it was too difficult to delete them.

F. Hollyer.

JOLI CŒUR.

VIII

IN 1870 Rossetti published his first volume of original poems. He was then and continued till his death the tenant of the house in Cheyne Walk; but he had tired of the habit of lavish purchasings to fill it, and a great deal of the brilliant joyousness was going out of his life. It was primarily a matter of ill-health; he suffered from insomnia and his eyesight was seemingly failing altogether. The ill-health, of course, arose from his mode of living, which was self-indulgent and irregular; he sat up very late at nights and in no way "took care of" himself. He had no essential feeling of the value of exercise. He "spent" his life in fact with no idea of husbanding it. Probably he saw no reason for so doing. Inevitably enough he had to pay the price and the price was a very heavy one.

The insomnia, which was of a frightful nature and an aggravated intensity, he combated by the use of chloral. And in this he seems to have been hardly used by Fate; for he was told, by the friend who recommended it, that it was innocuous. It was then a new remedy. Eventually he used it in enormous quantities. In later years he recognized well enough its ill effects and was definitely and avowedly content to abide by the results. It is a matter in which we have no right to judge; he being a man of another race and in his way clear-sighted.

Its necessary consequence was a morbid cast of

thought, ending in hallucinations. Accidents made the hallucinations take a special and very lamentable form.

It was in 1869 that, his eyesight threatening to fail permanently, Rossetti had serious thoughts of a career as a poet in the event of painting becoming impossible. (This idea, it may be remembered, he had definitely abandoned in 1853.) In the spring of 1870 the "Poems" appeared. They were received, for one reason and another, with immense favour—there was, in fact, what we should to-day call "a boom." Rossetti's friends were very many and very influentially placed, and Rossetti's friends were immensely enthusiastic as to the merits of the "Poems." Rossetti himself did his best to ensure a favourable reception for his work. How much this "best" amounted to is not very material in its ethical aspect; makes the matter neither better nor worse. He was certainly not servile in hunting for notices, but he certainly expected those of his friends who could write and thought favourably of his work, to write favourably. And it is obvious enough, from the permanent popularity of the "Poems," that they had an attraction operating quite independently of any efforts of Rossetti's personal friends.

The natural effect of sudden and great popularity, however gained, is the more or less effective counterblast. This is inevitable enough. In the case of the poems the damnatory article came eighteen months after the publication of the "Poems." It appeared in the *Contemporary Review*, was entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry," and was signed Thomas Maitland. It attacked Rossetti's poems reasonably enough for certain technical defects or exaggerations, and wholly unreasonably on the grounds of "the sickening desire they evinced to produce the sensual mood." The

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THE LADY WITH THE FAN

second heading might have been the product of a more or less pardonable mistake as far as the article in the *Contemporary* was concerned. The article left Rossetti at bottom comparatively unmoved.

He wrote a letter to the *Athenæum* temperately enough defending his poems from any purposed immorality of tendency. It was to have formed part of a pamphlet entitled the "Stealthy School of Criticism." (It had in the meanwhile appeared that the "Thomas Maitland" of the *Contemporary* was in effect the pseudonym of Mr. Robert Buchanan.) Rossetti's pamphlet was never published, partly for fear of giving Mr. Buchanan cause for a libel action.

So far the matter remained merely one of those unpleasant literary incidents that must, it would seem, be perpetuated as long as Art endures and writers have zealous friends. But Mr. Buchanan, for reasons of his own, saw fit to amplify his article and republish it in the form of a really abominable pamphlet entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry and other Phenomena of the Day, by Robert Buchanan." "He here"—the words are those of Mr. William Rossetti—"definitely identified Rossetti, as well as some other poets, with a supposed movement for the propagation of whatever is most foul in vice and most disgusting in vicious display." Mr. Buchanan (he is dead now and his motives need no longer be inquired into) afterwards dedicated a book to "An old enemy," Rossetti; and later, after Rossetti's death, wrote: "I was most unjust when I impugned the purity and misconceived the passion of writing too hurriedly read and reviewed *currente calamo*. I make full admission of Rossetti's claim to the purest kind of literary renown." This was the *amende honorable* and the matter might rest there.

Lamentably enough, however, the personal as distinct

from the literary, attack on Rossetti shaped the course of the dismal hallucinations for which chloral had already prepared Rossetti's over-taxed and over-tired brain. It is impossible to say whether he would or would not have had other hallucinations; but it is certain that the horror of so vile and so unjustifiable an accusation made things infinitely worse and definitely caused Rossetti to think that there was in the world a gigantic conspiracy to hold him up to obloquy. This idea haunted him for a long time; under the horror of it he attempted to commit suicide; it riveted the chloral habit finally upon him and the one thing and the other sapped his life and in their effects gradually ruined his work. The whole affair is one of the most cruel and unnecessary that the history of the Arts can show, and one of the most lamentable that in life can be imagined.

Rossetti's personal character in his human relations was fine, generous and magnanimous. He had no jealousy and no conception of jealousies. His purse and his encouragement were open and ready for every comer. And it was precisely on this account—because the shock of a personal attack so bitter, harsh and parochial brought him very hardly down to this real earth—that the thong left so deep a mark upon his serenity. It is the more pitiable in that his sunny generosity of character was, perhaps, his most perfect expression of himself, more complete than either of his arts with their undefined boundaries. And that a man of his temperament should be brought to see a hostile mob in a crowd come out for a fairing; to hear in the whistle of a blackbird the signals of ambushed spies and scoffers; that, in fact, suspicion should become an exaggerated part of his mental scheme, is tragedy as nearly as may be in this world.

Rossetti, in fact, was unstinted in his givings of all

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STUDY OF A HEAD

that he had; of his money, his sympathies, his enthusiasms. He expected unstinted givings from those he came in contact with. And, as a rule, he found what he expected. The friends he had were very many and very good—one says that he had a magnetic personality. "What a supreme man is Rossetti!" Philip Marston wrote to Oliver Madox Brown. "Why is he not some great exiled king, that we might give our lives in trying to restore him to his kingdom?" And this was the sort of feeling and saying that Rossetti inspired all his life through. It was, because Rossetti's own human sympathies were so boundless; because he was ready to take any man at his own value—and to idealize him to boot; because, in fact, he was Romantic.

Romanticism, of course, has its qualifying defects; your Romantics look at things in a convex mirror, as it were, and see the world with a strong character of its own but out of focus. It has been said that one of its perils is that those under the glamour are apt to tire. Mr. Ruskin, for instance, had by this date very definitely tired of Rossetti. Another salient instance is that of Mr. William Bell Scott, who remained throughout Rossetti's life his excellent good friend, loyal, helpful and always hospitable. But when Mr. Scott came to write his memoirs the reaction had already set in, had perhaps reached a pitch of violence that called for re-reaction. Rossetti is then written of with a bitter twist that one would have liked to see straightened out. A friend who never "rounded on" Rossetti was Madox Brown, to whose, on the whole, sane and undying affection the present writer can very intimately testify — whose almost last words were . . . "But Gabriel was a genius!"

Another qualifying defect of a Romantic friendship is, as has been said, the tendency of one friend to spur

another to sympathetic efforts, to encourage him to exaggerate. Something of these tendencies in Rossetti's art-work has already been said. The Pre-Raphaelites had encouraged him towards Primitive methods; Ruskin towards Florentinism; Morris and his friends towards Decorativism. Madox Brown probably always incited him towards intellectual or "literary" painting—towards pictures, that is, more or less definitely anecdotic. On the other hand Madox Brown's advice in matters of pure painting, of proportion and composition was almost always sane, practical, and founded on real knowledge. He was, on the whole, outside the family, Rossetti's best friend. Mr. and Mrs. Morris remained firm friends of Rossetti. They shared with him at first Kelmscott Manor near Lechlade in the early seventies.

Very much the same of good and ill may be said of Rossetti's literary friendships. These included in early days Coventry Patmore, the Brownings, and to a less extent Tennyson. In the early sixties he housed, at Cheyne Walk, with Mr. Meredith (whose more precise personal tastes comparatively soon made him abandon the experiment, but who none the less really liked Rossetti), and with Mr. Swinburne, who remained his most fervid friend and admirer. Later, in 1873, came Mr. Theodore Watts, without whose practical friendship and advice, and without whose literary aids and sustenance, life would have been from thenceforth an impracticable affair for Rossetti. Then came the "Pre-Raphaelite" poets like Philip Marston, O'Shaughnessy, and B. V. Afterwards there came a whole host of young men like Mr. William Sharp who were serious admirers, and to-day are in their places or are dead or forgotten; others like Mr. Hall Caine, who for a long time was practically Rossetti's attendant; and others again who

came for the "pickings." They were all more or less enthusiasts.

To all this there remain the drawbacks. It is sufficiently obvious that neither Mr. Swinburne nor Mr. Watts were wanting in the critical faculty (Mr. Watts indeed was at times more than exigent in matters of verse). But both poets were too much in sympathy with Rossetti to be very coldly critical, and a certain amount of adversity would have been probably chastening to Rossetti as a poet. From most of the others, at any rate, Rossetti got very much more applause than criticism. It was inevitable in the relationships of young, romantic men with one already more than eminent and glamorous. The temper of those who wished him to be a great king that they might lay down their lives for him must of necessity have been the reverse of chastening.

Rossetti left a large body of original poetry of a kind that stands alone in English literature. It has a great luxuriance, an impulse, a great importance. Its appearance may be said to have altered the aspect of the modern literary field—to have enlarged its bounds. It is, as a whole, almost purely sensual—as opposed to purely intellectual. And, in its impulse, it is purely natural. It is, in fact, a thing for which there was room.

Its most radical defects are entirely technical ones; the most salient a simple want of selection, a too great profusion. There are, so to speak, too much of sweetness, too many jewels. And these jewels are contrasted with passages of comparatively threadbare work in a way that seems incomprehensible but that is really open enough to explanation.

In the "White Ship," for instance, there are whole tens of verses that are merely rhymed chronicle—"King Henry of England's realm was he and Henry

Duke of Normandy." The ballad might have begun at line thirty-one, or even, if considered as pure poetry, with the starting of the White Ship from the harbour mouth. Yet it is worth reading a long way to come to—

And the ship was gone and the crowd was gone,
And the deep shuddered and the moon shone.

If only, in fact, Rossetti could have lived to look upon his verses with a cold eye, disillusioned of enthusiasms and with the keen knife of the surgeon and the great courage to cut!

Directly opposed to this we have, say, the first sonnet of the "House of Life"—"Love Enthroned." Here such an idea as—

And Fame whose loud wings fan the ashen Past
To signal fires. . . .

a wonderful enough jewel surely, is robbed of all its effect by being bedded in jewelled images and lost in a catalogue of pictures of Abstract Ideas. And there is the same tendency all through the "House of Life"—the discounting of things really and brilliantly *seen*, with images *willed* to complete by analogy the literary idea. What in fact could be more beautiful than—

On this sweet bank your head thrice sweet and dear
I lay, and spread your hair on either side,
And see the new-born wood-flowers bashful-eyed
Look through the golden tresses here and there.
On these debateable borders of the year
Spring's foot half falters. . . .

But it comes after a great deal of forcing of ideas and images that will not carry conviction. This arose very much from the desire to leave nothing to the imagination; from a desire to be clear, in fact.

[Thus the Beryl Songs were introduced as explanations, pure and simple, into the ballad of "Rose Mary."] Yet an immense part of the technique and of the charm of poetry is in the fact that it is suggestive—lies in a contrast of clear statement with reticence. That is selection. Upon the whole, "Jenny" is the most satisfying of Rossetti's works as a poet, probably because it is the most directly observed and less consciously "felt-poetic." And upon the whole the best and most vital of all Rossetti's moral-drawings, the most dispassionate and most surprisingly-flashed piece of observation is contained in the lines—

How Jenny's clock ticks on the shelf!
Might not the dial scorn itself
That has such hours to register?

There is very much of the ironic, subtle, and true aspects of life written in these three lines. Rossetti, in fact, could see very straight and very keenly.

This may bring us at once back to the question of Rossetti's later paintings. The *Veronica Veronese*, a work full of charm, was painted in 1872. It, according to Mr. William Rossetti, "embodies some of Rossetti's more abstract ideas as to the relation between Nature and Art." Mr. William Sharp offers a spirited account of an anecdote which the picture is supposed to be founded upon. What the picture itself shows is a very charming woman listening to a canary. She has an abstracted expression and her hands are occupied with a violin and a bow, as if she were trying to catch the keynote of the bird's song. The success of the picture is undoubtedly in the listener's expression, which is observed and caught. The hands and arms are mannered and as such are not convincing. Similar in attempt and success is the *Ghirlandata*, another wonderfully charming picture, which in 1873 practically

succeeded the *Veronica*. Here again the expression of a girl's head is the mainly valuable point. She has at hand a harp and is going either to sing or to play from memory. The keen way in which these transitory and definite expressions are unerringly fixed, show the real significance of Rossetti as an artist to-day. Similar in feeling is the *Roman Widow*, a fine pastel of 1874. It is notable, as an indication, that the lady is simply not Roman-classical in type at all.

More or less contemporary with these is the *Proserpine*, which as a rendering of a very fine woman of a certain type in a place lit from afar by daylight is a very wonderful piece of work. As a physical impression she is somewhat markedly "Rossettian"; specialized, that is, and in pose a little exaggerated. But these things must be allowed to any and every artist. What is most distinctly worthy of remark is the disproportionate size of the right hand. Rossetti, with a perfectly truly observed idea, used his figures' hands to emphasize their characters, their moods. And it was here, his draughtsmanship being uncertain, and his sense of proportion never very trained, that his particular form of intellectual mysticism and moral didacticism generally found its Nemesis in the later years.

Rossetti continued painting more or less irregularly for some seven years more, but his powers for one reason and another declined rather rapidly. It would perhaps be more correct to say that his level of excellence fluctuated much, but with a generally downward trend. One may say that his most satisfactory subsequent works were several very individual and convincing portraits in pastel; those of Mr. Watts-Dunton, Mrs. Stillman, and the double portrait of his mother and Christina may be taken as examples of a very high level. Of large pictures, the *Bower*

Meadow, the background of which had been painted at Sevenoaks in 1849, is one of the tenderest and most charming. The *Sea Spell* is a brilliant piece of work which does not fit its title. One or two like the *Astarte Syriaca*, the *Mnemonyse*, and the last *Salutation of Beatrice* show distressing signs of failing powers.

In 1881 Rossetti completed the large oil replica of the *Dante's Dream*, and published his "Ballads and Sonnets." In 1882 he died at Birchington.

IX

ROSSETTI has been dead twenty years, but the time has not yet come when it may be possible to " place " him even as approximately as we can place the other dead of twenty years ago and less. His death, as far as the public is concerned, was only his birth as an artist. He had exhibited practically no pictures, and his fame had been a matter almost purely of rumour. Then the Royal Academy made an Old Master of him, and exhibited a rather " scratch " collection of his pictures, badly hung and representative only of his later works. Since then other exhibitions have given opportunities for seeing him piecemeal, and his fame probably stands higher than it ever did. He has, in fact, been alive nearly twenty years, having been dead in the flesh as many.

His influence upon the Nation is probably large and is felt in unexpected places. Men, under it, often enough choose their wives ; ladies who look " like Rossetti's " even to-day stand a very excellent chance of getting married on the strength of that and little else. Such things " count "—and what is more, they count towards an ultimate reaction, because the Poetry of to-day is only too often the sentimentality of to-morrow, the Book of Beauty of to-day only too inevitably the trunk-lining of the immediate future. What then is to be the lot of Rossetti's fame and influence ?

Autotype.

ROSA TRIPLEX.

ROSSETTI

The Critic's is after all the saddest lot of mortal man; to him, more than to any other, are revealed the fallibility of men's judgments, the futility of men's efforts. He must strive to discover Principles, knowing always too well that the Principles of To-day are the fallacies of To-morrow; that he himself is a speck in the immensity of To-day, and To-day itself but a particle in the infinite actions and reactions of Tastes, of Time, of Mankind. Confronted by a To-day that has unanimously enough accepted what Rossetti did; by a To-day that without much thought has accepted what Rossetti thought he stood for; the Critic's easiest subterfuge is to say: To-morrow there will be a reaction.

To-morrow there will be a reaction. It becomes one's task to say what that reaction will be. It has been forcibly put already, that Rossetti—who at one time was "honoured among painters as a painter and among poets as a poet"—was "an amateur who failed in two Arts." It is true. Yet it hardly harms Rossetti or touches his standing. On the contrary it defines both very brilliantly. Because, in the infinite scale of things, there is room enough for the amateur—for the man whose love for his art transcends his technical abilities. Every age does not lay the same stress on "technique." The eighteenth century demanded an excellent technique from its poets, and the eighteenth century is very dead. And the small word "failed" is a small word and little more to artists who are for ever going on until they give over a game that must be lost. Every artist when confronted by the immensities of Art which is Life must confess to failure. And failure is a thing very relative.

It is therefore not enough to say that To-morrow there will be a reaction. The point for the critic is whether or no on the day after to-morrow there will

not be a re-reaction. The morrow of Shakespeare reacted against him too. The question is whether or no in the work of Rossetti there is a quality that may make him seem valuable even after reaction has done its work; whether a future tired of professionals who succeed in one art may not call again out of the depths, the type which is "The Amateur who failed in two."

Rossetti indeed was an Amateur, because he never really mastered the theory of either of his arts; because he never really and clearly recognized his limits or systematically put his great powers to their best uses and to these uses alone. He was not cold-blooded enough to be self-conscious, self-analytical enough to be other than prodigal. He wasted his gifts as he wasted his life, with a fine unconsciousness.

The probability is that he will survive, if not on account of the one great quality of his that he neglected—the one essential quality—then as a great and touching figure of one prodigal of his gifts, of his enthusiasms, of his life. He was contemptuous of the great law of the art of to-day; the law all of whose seven commandments is, "Select! and again select!" And inasmuch as a gallant law-breaker, a fine prodigal, a Robin Hood of the Arts is a man for whom a warm corner is kept in the hearts of a law-abiding people, so, perhaps unconsciously, if for that alone, a warm corner will be kept for Rossetti. If he "failed" in the making of a place it was for these reasons: He was conscious that he was a poet; it is probable that he was unconscious of what really made him the fine poet that he was in both his arts. He wrote—

Accepting me to be of those that haunt
The vale of magical dark mysteries
Where to the hills her poet's foot-track lies. . . .

And the lines sum up his view of himself and his view

of what poetry is in either of the arts. Setting aside the latter matter, it is safe to say that his view of himself was wrong, was founded on an affectation.

Rossetti was an Italian in England; his one great gift was purely Italian, his great keenness of sight—of insight into life, of power to catch the character of externals. He was essentially Italian, and pagan as Italians are, in his delight at things as they are, at life as it is. What he got from his English surroundings, unfortunately enough, was the idea, amounting to an obsession, that Poetry is a matter of mists hiding, of glamours confusing the outlines of things; a matter, in fact, not of calling things by their right names but of alluding and alluding and then again alluding. Whereas his real gift was that of laying bare, of catching the essential characteristics very clear-headedly. And, being convinced that poetry is literary mysticism, he was always more or less concerned to show that he was a literary mystic. His "illustrations" were almost invariably references either to the "Divina Commedia," the "Mort d'Arthur," or to some other more or less erudite and "poetic" work. For the same reason he continually warped his pictures that he might introduce symbols. So much of Rossetti's keenness of insight was spent, not like a clear light upon the life he treated of, but upon the men with whom he lived, upon the men who asked him for work.

He painted so as to be in sympathy with Holman Hunt; then with Ruskin; then with Morris, Burne-Jones and the Aesthetes, and in his later stages more or less to keep in touch with a body of patrons. [Several of these last, like Mr. George Rae and Mr. Leyland, were his warm personal friends. It has indeed been said that Mr. Leyland liked Rossetti more than anyone else in the world.] It was in this last

stage, when he was more or less consciously painting to sell, that he could give himself the most liberty in really expressing his own individuality. In the early stages, at least, he used his keen sight, his wonderful power of instinctively sympathizing with all the world, much more definitely so as to please his company than as to express himself. He had in perfection, both in his personality and in his art, that marvellous Italian power of acting, dramatically, so as to charm his companions. And a great many of his pictures are like mirrors in which are reflected parts of the world in the taste of the successive bodies of his friends. Rossetti himself, nevertheless, supplied the quicksilver at the back of the mirrors.

All these men were more or less "literary" people whose poetry was distinctly and entirely allusive; who lived and thought in terms of Florentine Art or Arthurian Romance. And Rossetti, who was an Italian, caught from them that peculiarly English habit of mind. Yet the great book which the artist must either illustrate or comment upon is Life and not anything in literature.

Rossetti eventually carried his allusiveness, his literary symbolism so far that he passed the bounds of even an illustrator of one or other of the great works of literature. A picture ought to explain itself, and many of his need textual expositions. The real trouble, the real danger to his fame is that he came to paint and write for a limited circle of men well read in a certain type of work. The great poet should make his appeal to all humanity.

Dante's story of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini holds all the world to-day because, without allusion to anything, it is a clear, keen, cold, and yet sympathetic, human rendering of passion, sin and retribution. Rossetti's picture of the same title appeals to us not as

a picture of Dante's rendering of that incident, but as a picture of immense, vibrating passion that Rossetti had observed for himself.

The "Jenny" again is a great poem because it is a clear-sighted observation of manners. The writer neither shudders with the citizen at the prostitute, nor falls to the other and obvious extreme of railing at the society that keeps her beyond the pale. He observes her with the tolerant, gentle irony that he bestows on the other side, and treats her with the sympathetic insight and the conscious aloofness that, to the creator in the Arts, is the one quality essential for permanence.

A painter who has registered so much of life as Rossetti has done in the *Paolo and Francesca*, the *Beata Beatrix*, the *Beloved* and *Aurea Catena;* who has caught here and there so many transient emotions and indicated so much of pure sensualism as are to be found in places here and there in his work in almost incredible profusion; who could seize so unconventionally the vital characteristics of a life with so strong a convention as that of the eighteenth century—as he has done it in the *Johnson at the Mitre;* a man who could catch so clearly the character of a number of his fellow men and women, cannot be said to have failed altogether, however great may be an inevitable reaction. The reaction when it comes will be against his exaggerations and his affectations. It is difficult to see how deep these went, but it is hard to believe that they "touched the bone."

The present writer must plead guilty to being too near his subject to be able to see in these matters very clearly. However determined he may be to apply logically and even viciously the touchstones of what for us to-day are the canons of our knowledge, the application is painful for many reasons. The task is

one to be taken in hand by critics as much with the view of saving Rossetti's name from the dangers of eulogy, which is vulgarization; as with the view—which is this present writer's—of striking a fair balance in face of the changing tastes of each new generation. One thing at least is certain. Rossetti's must have been an impressive figure, or it would not now be a topic unto the second generation. Rossetti wrote thus of a book of Blake's, and the words may fittingly and romantically apply to his own work:

"Any who can here find anything to love will be the poet painter's welcome guests, still such a feast is spread first of all for those who can know at a glance that it is theirs and was meant for them; who can meet their host's eye with sympathy and recognition even when he offers them the new, strange fruits grown for himself in far gardens where he has dwelt alone, or pours for them the wines which he has learned to love in lands where they never travelled."

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